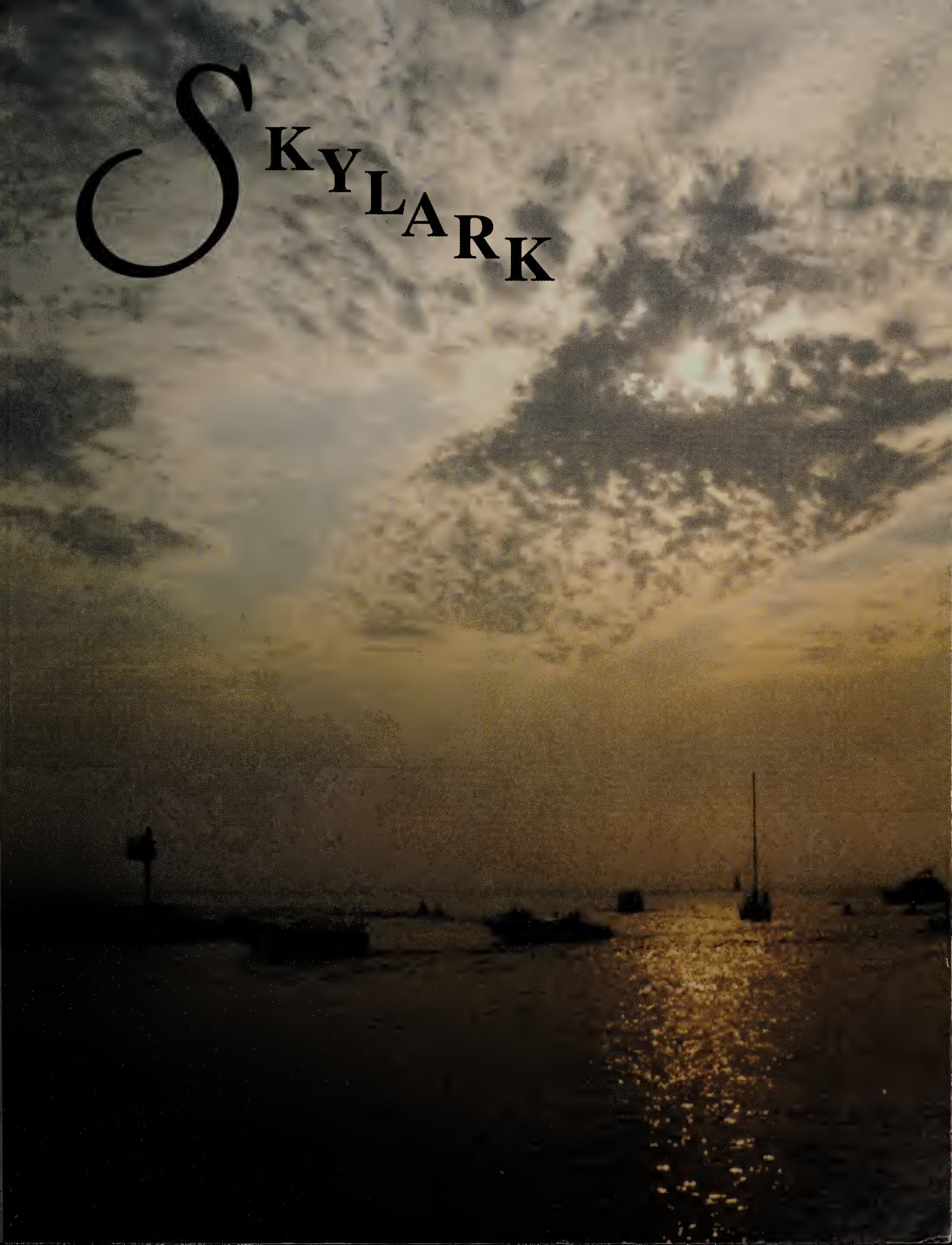


SKYLARK



Memorial Service

In a nearby city
I don't know very well
I pull off on a side street
a block past the mortuary.
There are children everywhere,
playing on the cold street,
crying on gray porches.
One wobbles on a yellow bike.
Two boys, shorter than the fence
between them, argue.
A girl runs to them, yelling,
and one leaves in tears.
Some wear jackets and wool hats.
One boy has only a tee shirt.
The cold air sharpens their noise.
Above and white around them
swoop sea gulls, flapping, yacking,
as if they ate children.
When I come out of the mortuary,
the sea gulls and children are gone.

—*Tim Blackburn*
Bridgewater, New Jersey



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This magazine publishes work by children and by adults on the acknowledged premise that children and more mature literary artists should be published side by side.

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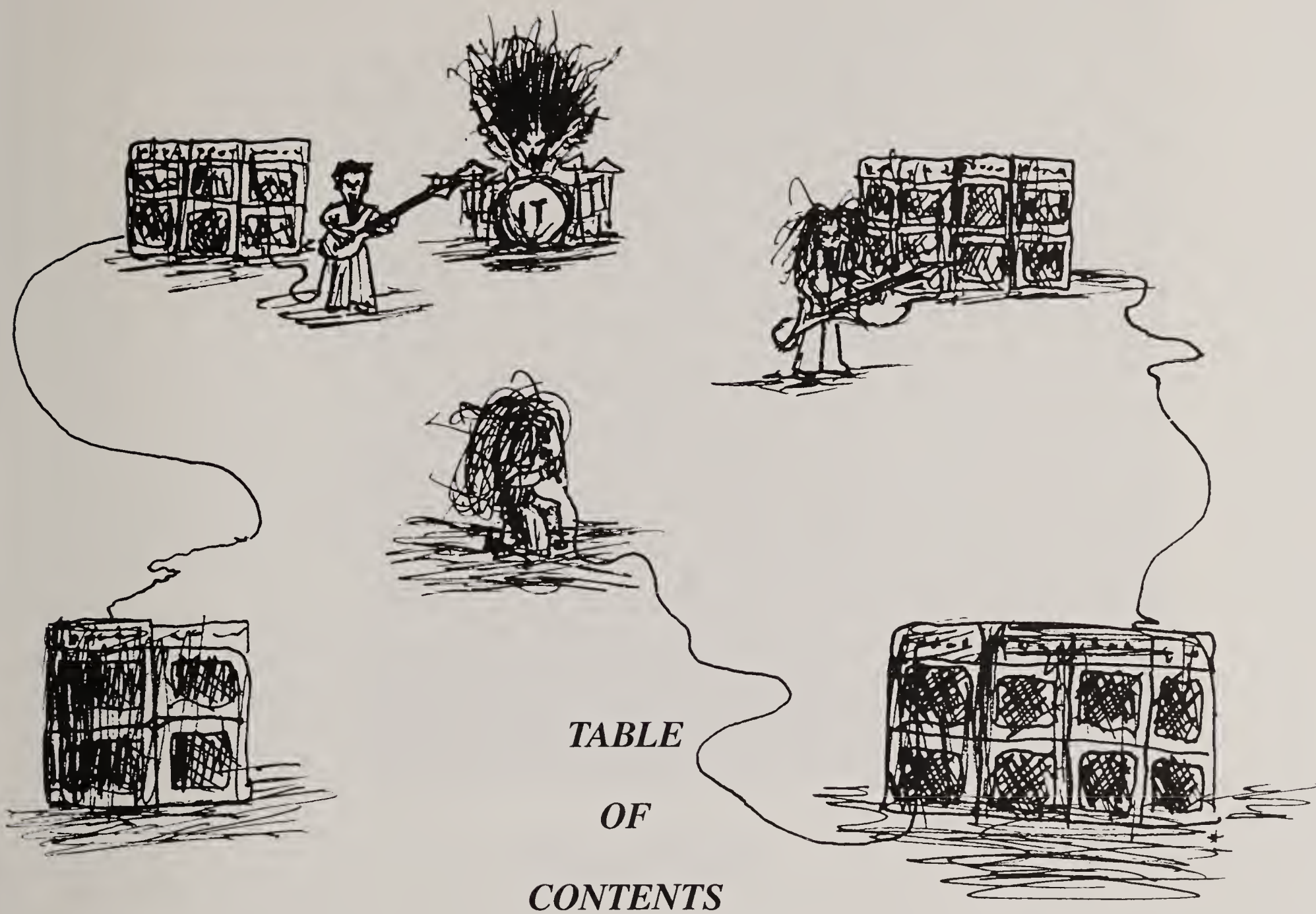
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James Yackel, Chancellor's Message

4

Doors by Gordon Ligoeki

5

Poetry and Prose

6-47

Childhood

48-73

Young Writers

74-91

Index

98



Photo courtesy of PUC Office of University Relations

SKYLARK

Dr. Robert Pinsky, Poet Laureate of the United States, visited Purdue University Calumet recently. On October 6, 1999, he spoke to the Northwest Indiana Writing Project annual meeting describing the poetry reading events which he has conducted around this country. The audience was spellbound as he related his story and used poetry to emphasize his message that poetry reading events served to build community.

I was impressed by the similarity of Dr. Pinsky's poetry readings as they impact the process of community building and the effect of *SKYLARK* on this northwest Indiana community. This issue of *SKYLARK* has a story to tell with a focus on children. As you read this issue, please join with me in reflecting also on the community building effect of *SKYLARK* on writers as well as readers.

SKYLARK continues to receive accolades as an outstanding collegiate publication. I thank the faculty advisory, Professor Charles Tinkham, for his leadership and the editorial staff for their professional touches.

JAMES YACKEL
Chancellor

DOORS

By Gordon Ligocki

Door to the Woods began as a visual enigma. Unfortunately, nothing in life can ever remain that simple.

Eventually the idea grew to explore whether doors are entrances or barriers. Was the door to be a closed passage into the woods or a symbolic entrance?



Photo courtesy of Skylark


Then the space behind the door became the issue. What might lie behind the door that couldn't be seen from the rest of the woods or that might be different?

Even this simple idea eventually grew from a closely-cropped, grassy area amidst the briars to a more complex meditation space with a wood bench. As more people became intrigued with the mysterious door and more input was offered, it evolved from a meditative clearing to a vine-and-branch briar patch hideaway.

In its present form, it has grown into a comfortable nest. Serene beyond the already existing tranquillity of the woods themselves. It is used by people and even cats.

The final wrinkle that grew from the simple visual gag of a door in the woods is a "connecting" door nearly a half mile down river for those with enough imagination to travel that journey.

*Artist Gordon Ligocki lives
in Winamac, Indiana.*



Beekeeper

He could have been a charmer—coaxing snakes
from their bodies to reach for sound
the way plants lean toward the light.

He could have been a keeper—of songs,
notes gathered to shape what was
left unsaid but felt in the rise

and fall of melodic sweep.
Keep back, he warns,
and I wonder how he can hold these bees

barehanded, hoards clinging to his arms,
his fingers barely exposed.
He works the smoker between the super's cracks,

pries off another layer of brood.
The smoke briefly clouds my view
then it lifts beyond the lindens.

I am careful to keep my distance.

—Nancy Carlson
Silver Spring, Maryland

Marie Bunker

The Hummingbird

In my house
In a room
Filled with sun
Suspended in its exact center
Floated a hummingbird,
Orange with blue
Head, wings, and back.

This small angel
Of energy, its wings
Fast thrumming with life,
Looked me in the eye
And then slowly turned
Its back to me as if
Knowing what must be done.

I cupped the creature
In my hands and it stopped,
Rested in its hovering flight
As I carried it to the window
And set it to sail on the air.
I know now it was a dream
But I thirst for its meaning.

—K. S. Hardy
Bowling Green, Ohio

Cathy Michniewicz,
Poetry Editor
&
Gordon Stamper,
Prose Editor

POETRY



PROSE

Near By Far

The trick is to make a prison like a home:
Pretty pictures, fruit on the table, the blue river
seen from a window—
The thing is to know how to stay inside and roam.

The cushion on the sofa is threadbare red,
But even the most undiscerning visitor must wonder
If that is the place the odalisque laid her head.

In the sunlight, marmalade, rolls, butter electrified—
And yet somehow mixed, even mannered,
So that no one knows if you take sides—Which side?

The river you can see has such confidence in circuit,
course—
You can go with it to the ends of the earth,
And never find that you have spent yourself or wasted
all its force.

This is just to say that large or smaller space is loaded:
The table really groans with grace, the butterfly outside
escapes
For you with wings deliciously, deliriously coded.

They are odd persuasive things—house, horizon.
Heap your bread with marmalade and take a drink of long
blue water—
Messages received: The prisoner, the man upon those wings
are one.

—Charles Eaton
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

A Fish and a Knife

You have to slide your hand around it
from the head back, smooth down
the spiny dorsal fin so it won't cut you,
the awkward weight of this life
flopping in your two hands.
Then pluck the hook from the fish's lip

and consider it, if you will, eye to eye,
and either throw it back or throw it
in the bucket. Later the flap, then plunk
of the fish against the table
like a wing of heavy light,
the silver-blue luster of its underbelly
turning in the light.

In life, they say, you either fish or cut bait,
so we decided we'd fish—
out on the dock and long
after dark, a bucket of beer
beside our bucket of fish, our voices
hung across the darkness, pulling tight
the years between us, the tug

at the line like an electric shock we'd always love
because it spelled the chance
to bring in the unknown—or lose it to the lake.
Zak, you swore, when something heavy
broke the line, the reel smelt
of smoke. I tried naming all the great fishermen
of the Bible, from Jonah on down, and you

said, *If that boat was really so full
of fish, Jesus should have made Peter walk back.
That would be a miracle.* You had the story line
tangled, but the feeling was right.
Just shy of dawn, we cleaned
what we caught, each with a fish and a knife,
the scales coming off on our hands like shaved ice.
Boned, beheaded perch stacked
on the chopping block. Cold, translucent light.

—Matthew Thorburn
Lansing, Michigan



PICNIC IN VENICE

by Konnie M. Ellis

There goes Stefano, the artist, and right on time. He passes Rose Visconti's lace shop every morning at 7:15, a white scarf trailing behind his black coat, a sketchbook under his arm. His dark hair is a mass of curls just covering his ears, which he believes to be the right length for an artist. He's a vain man, good looking, despite his odd nose which twists slightly to the right and is sharp enough that one thinks of cartilage upon observing him closely. Rose's cartilage, however, is not apparent. She is a solid woman, a woman of bone.

"Morning Stefano," Rose says as she cranks open her awning. "How are you this morning?"

"Hmmm," he says, stopping as usual to admire her blue awning. He likes the lace curtains in the window, too, intricate curtains with bird shapes—white doves which seem to float in a lacy white web.

Rose smiles, waiting to see what he has to say today, though sometimes he says nothing.

"Sun's coming out," he says solemnly. "And you know, I have a good feeling about today. Just a really good feeling." He adjusts his silk scarf, wishes her a good day, then strides off down the street.

Rose watches him walk away. His long legs look wobbly, quivery, like reflections of tall trees in water, and she lets her mind go as wavery as his wobbly legs, until she's nearly in a trance, her mind as empty as the early morning air. Not until he gets to the bridge does she come back to herself, to her everyday self, and returns to her shop.

"Another day, another day," she says entering the tiny lace shop. Feebi is sweeping the floor in front of the cash register where the sun is shining on the floor. Feebi sweeps the oak floor methodically, left to right, left to right, sweeping over the grain in the wood as if trying to sweep more than mere dust. Her hair hangs forward as she works, flimsy silky hair dangling like broken birds' nests and sparkling in the morning sun.

"That's fine, Feebi. It looks just fine."

Feebi looks up at her mother, unsure, then stands upright and smiles. She leaves the broom in the corner and follows her mother outside.

"Here you go." Rose sets a cup of milky coffee on the little table near the door, where Feebi can sit and watch the people and boats go by.

"Thank you, Mama," Feebi tells her mother as she settles down with her coffee, gently touching the small red birds that circle the rim of her cup. Rose stands beside her daughter for a moment, a feeling of something to be said at the tip of her tongue, she doesn't know what, but it feels right just knowing something, something rather nice, is lingering in the morning air, in the sunlight about them.

Rose knows people say Feeble Feebi behind her back. She doesn't mind their being two-faced because they ask so nicely after Feebi. She's forgiving. They don't know Feebi though, not really. Not that Rose understands her daughter either, but now with Stefano coming by like he does, she's starting to look at Feebi a little differently, a little more hopefully. She knows she's lucky to have Feebi at all, after the accident that took Joe. Feebi was four and it had been a special occasion, her going along in the boat with her father to see the lace women out on the island. After they were far out in the open water, a fast-moving storm turned the tranquil sea into a swirling demon and their small boat was flipped about like a toy and smashed to splinters in the massive waves. Rose crosses herself for the miracle of the old barge that spotted Feebi bobbing up and down in her yellow life vest. They were able to get her breathing again, but she had been under too long and great damage had already been done.

They found Joe on the morning of the third day, waterlogged and blue on the shore of the island of the lace makers, covered with seaweed, both boots still on his feet, and his nose gone. They told her she needn't do so, but she went along with Joe's brother to identify him, and now that seaweed face

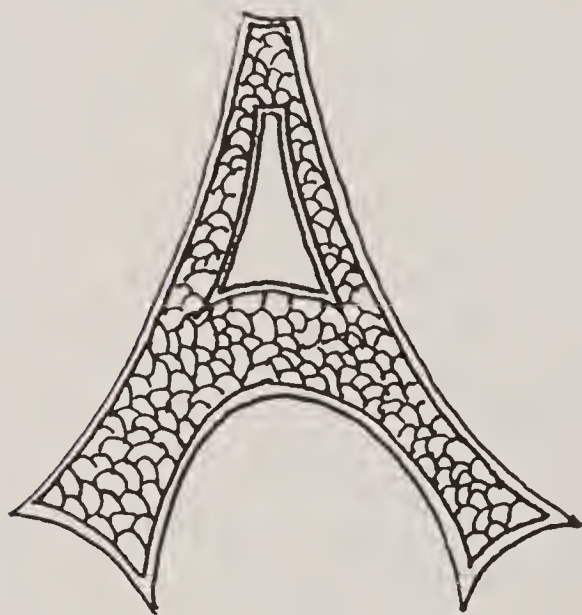
with the black hole has been the nightmare of her dreams for fourteen years. She always sees him just under the surface of the water, the seaweed draped down over his forehead, over his bacon-white face, slimy green seaweed that drifts back and forth over the black hole, like the curtain of a horror show opening and closing, opening and closing. His boots bobbing up and down in the water is what wakes her. She wants the dream to go away, or at least to change, but it's always the same, the same old classic horror movie she's forced to watch year after year.

Sometimes she thinks of Joe when she blows her nose. It gives her an odd funny feeling, imagining herself without a nose. Better he lost the nose than an eye, she's always told herself. Sometimes she even laughs about the missing nose, then ends up gulping and choking, horrified at her own bad taste. She winces at the thought of salt water in Joe's beautiful brown eyes. She adored his eyes, eyes like a winking saint she used to think, like the eyes of St. Peter in the stained-glass window she sees every Sunday in church, though of course St. Peter in the glass never winks.

Rose sighs, and readies the cash register for the day, then looks at Feebi. The front window curtain veils Feebi's profile; the intricate lace against her delicate features makes her seem like a fairy princess to Rose, like someone not quite real, someone not quite her daughter. Rose looks until the curtain is again just a curtain, and Feebi is herself, gazing peacefully out over the water of the canal. Feebi watches the water for such long periods of time that Rose always wonders just what she sees, what she's thinking. Sometimes she concentrates on the sky, sometimes the water. Lately, the same thought keeps coming back to Rose: Is Feebi an artist? Is she like Stefano? They both study the water and the sky. Other people don't do that, not so intently, not so single-mindedly. Stefano spends his days painting



the bridges and canals of the city, the complicated old buildings reflected in the water. She sees his enthusiasm each morning, how he's ready for each new day like it will be a fresh and entirely new day unlike any that have gone before. Just like Feebi. Does it matter that Feebi can barely print her name? Rose doesn't know, but she wants to get a glimpse of this world of light, or color, whatever they see, Feebi and Stefano. Perhaps she could buy a box of pastels, just a small box. Or colored pencils? She unconsciously opens and closes her hands, trying to express, to understand.



When Belle stops by the store after lunch, and Gina takes over in the shop, instead of joining Belle and Feebi in front of the TV, Rose is ready to catch a boat down to St. Mark's and look for Stefano. She'll watch him paint. That's all.

She closes the door and tiptoes down the back stairs, leaving Belle and Feebi to their black and white Western, the same one they watched together last week. The drone of the TV fades away like some old part of her life, and a boat motor takes its place as she reaches the bottom step. She walks along beside a boat carrying construction materials, which passes under the bridge as she crosses over. Her old walking shoes squeak as she speeds up and cuts across the church square, her usual shortcut to the Grand Canal. A young man is playing the flute on the church steps, a Verdi aria she likes, though she's not sure which opera it belongs to, and she pauses to listen. She hums the familiar theme as she continues on toward the open water of the canal.

The vaporetto pulls in just as she gets to the dock. Waiting her turn in the ticket line, the breeze from the water feels cool on her face

and she enjoys the sound of the waves gently sloshing against the dock. That small space of water between the dock and the boat makes her step back, recalling, as usual, the stage pit of her past. Before she married Joe, she studied scene painting with Elfonso, and had loved working on the enormous theater sets right up on stage. The pit, that's what they called the deep slit in the stage floor where the canvas was raised or lowered as you worked on the scene, eliminating the need for a ladder or scaffolding. It took concentration to remember you were painting right next to a deep narrow pit when you were painting tall snow-capped mountains or ships sailing into the harbor in a lavender twilight. But you had to be careful. You had to remember that deep hole next to you, so you wouldn't end up like Pascalli, who fell into the pit during Carnival. He was painting a starry blue night scene when he fell in and they found him down there the next day, unconscious, covered with dried blue paint like blue blood, and all cut up from a smashed chianti bottle. He suffered a concussion, broke several bones, and lost both his reason and his talent down in that pit. Now Pascalli is the pigeon man over in the square, eating popcorn and walking around with his cheeks puffed out, flapping his elbows like he's a bird trying to take off. Rose takes another step away from the edge of the dock.

She liked painting scenery, but she loved the theater, too. She liked the actors, with all their hugging and exaggerated ways, and the excitement of getting ready for a new play. "The play of my life," she says to herself as she boards the boat. The couple behind Rose think she's being friendly, commenting to them.

"Like a postcard," the man says to her.

"You don't get the smells in the travelogue," the lady adds.

Rose smiles without commenting. She is sure she's embarking on a journey of more importance than the short ride down the Grand Canal to St. Mark's Square. She finds herself walking to the front of the boat like an actress, taking rather formal steps in her old shoes, and she feels exceptionally alive. She takes a place up front to be closer to the water, to be out in the open so she can feel the sun on her face, though clouds have been coming and going all afternoon. She loves the way the boat surges forward as it starts down the canal. It's alive, she thinks, unsure

if she means the boat or the canal.

Immediately, they pass a racing gondola on its way out into the open waters. She recognizes the man on the farthest back oar as the son of Joseph's old neighbor who made papier-maché masks. She still has the gold cat mask he made. She narrows her eyes thinking of the cat's eyes.

The water is oily smooth today, the waves rounded, never sharply breaking, not even at the extreme curves of the canal. Rose has always been happy out on the water. She always breathes more deeply, breathing with the sea she calls it, the great mother sea. She and Joe had that love of the sea together, and she never lost it, even after Joe died, and Feebi nearly so. She never blamed the sea. She settles back to enjoy the ride along the canal. She likes watching all the old buildings, their feeble old bricks showing through here and there like parts of an old decrepit cake the city keeps trying to cover up with frosting. The blue and white striped water poles seem like festive parts of the cake, too, or candles for the big cake in the sea, and she loves both the old decomposing core, as well as the ornate facades of the buildings.

As they near St. Mark's, she sees Stefano as the boat pulls up to the dock. His easel is set up beyond the glass and coral stands where she plans to go first and browse a bit. She should be able to observe him from there without his noticing. She may not even talk to him today.



The "Postcard" people open their map as soon as they get off the boat, which Rose finds odd since you can't miss St. Mark's. She makes her way along quickly; it's crowded, but not like a weekend. She passes the first few vendors and stops at her favorite glass stand and begins to sort through the smaller items. She enjoys the imperfect pieces, the oddly shaped trays of pale pink frosty glass, the small aqua pin plates with bits of color like small fish trying

to swim through heavy water. Rose has her own glass collection, mostly inexpensive pieces she's bought at these stands—odd fanciful pieces she couldn't resist and which she has to hide from Feebi who loves them, too, but is too clumsy to handle the glass safely. Rose's favorites, though, are the little birds she keeps in a box, and the clear glass paperweight Joe gave her for their first anniversary, with real gold swirling inside like stars. She takes the birds and the paperweight out to admire when Feebi sleeps. These are from the more expensive shops, not these outdoor stands. Rose peers through a clear pale pink glass plate and looks toward the sky.

Stefano comes up behind her as she's peering through the pink glass. He smiles and says hello, and she smells the garlic of his breath.

"I do that, too," he tells her. "Look through the glass."

Now in Stefano's presence, Rose's fingers feel sweaty, and she fears she may drop the delicate plate. With a nonchalant concentration, she returns the glass tray to the table.

"My mother's name. And mine. Rose," she tells him, fingering some of the other glassware.

"Ah ha," he says, picking up the same tray she just put down. "Rose the Second."

"No, no. Women don't bother with that second business, you know. Not in my family," she says, more seriously than she intended.

Over at Stefano's easel, a man in a lime-green coat is examining a painting.

"Customer," she tells him, nodding in the direction of his easel. He raises his eyebrows to thank her and she watches as he rushes off. By the slight forward tilt of the man's head, Rose can tell the man is going to buy something. Rose finds herself humming, something she doesn't ordinarily do in public. Stefano says little to the man, mostly listens and nods his head, holding his hands behind his back. The man gets out his wallet. Stefano wraps the painting in tissue and then slides it into a cardboard case and tapes it up. They shake hands and Stefano tucks the bundle of *lire* inside his jacket pocket, with a gesture Rose finds both greedy and elegant. As the man in the lime-green coat walks off with the painting, Stefano beckons to Rose, who has been slowly walking toward him since the man left with his painting.

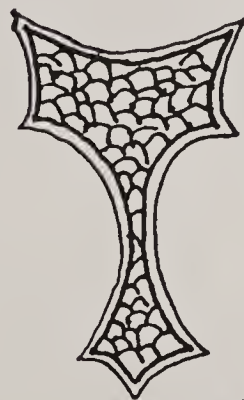
The sale was a good one, he tells her. Not only did he make out well, but they exchanged cards.

"Sr. Diamonti. Very important guy. He has a gallery in Milan, and his brother is opening a second gallery in Paris. This is very good, Rose," he tells her, rolling forward onto the balls of his feet like he's going to take a little leap into the air, but then he settles back onto his heels. Rose sighs and wiggles her toes inside her heavy shoes.

"Enough for today," he says.

As he gathers his equipment together, she examines a small painting of a lone pigeon standing on a stone bridge above the silvery water of the canal in early morning light.

"Rose, Rose, I always think of you as the Lady of the Blue Awning," Stefano says, wrapping up the pigeon painting. "Come celebrate with me."



Rose laughs, a little surprised he would ask an old woman like herself, with her thick socks and old-fashioned shoes, immediately wishing she had worn her new sweater and not this old brown one with the missing button. But she raises her chin, feeling ready for the unusual, and remembering the orange in her pocket she says: "Yes, let's celebrate." She holds up the orange like a prize. "To the pigeons," she says, which is simply the first thing that comes into her mind.

"To the pigeons. And the Pope's Nose!" Stefano says with gusto, slinging his easel over his shoulder.

Rose gasps, then starts to laugh, a small polite laugh behind her hand.

Stefano laughs, too, for the sheer joy of being alive Rose thinks, and what a gift, to be able to laugh. Pigeons can't laugh. The

dead can't laugh. And she wonders if the Pope ever laughs.

"We can eat in Mario's boat," Stefano tells her. "He's my old pal; I eat there sometimes. That's where I leave my easel and paints at night."

Crossing the square, they pass the postcard couple talking loudly at one another, and before they turn off to their side street, Rose sees a short plump man videotaping Pascalli, who is strutting around like a pigeon, his head wobbling on his neck like a weary snake charmer, surrounded by curious pigeons and amused tourists.

"The Pigeon Man," Stefano says. "The guy's an act. I've seen him after hours, dressed to kill—leather jacket, expensive shoes, hand-made shirts. Fancy friends, too. He actually lives at the Danielle."

"No." Rose is so surprised and it is hard to believe, seeing him so raggy and bent over here on the square.

"It's true," Stefano says. They walk to the end of the narrow street in silence, then both stop to look back toward the square at the same time.

"Sad," Rose says.

"Yes, and funny too," Stefano adds.

Rose agrees, but neither laughs.

They make a circle to get to Mario's boat, crossing two bridges, and passing the glass shop where Rose buys her glass birds. They pass a cheese shop she likes, even though she knows it's overpriced, being so near St. Mark's, yet she insists on stopping to buy a nice thick wedge of cheese. Fontinella. With the cheese and her orange, she feels prepared for a picnic on a boat. As they near the last bridge, the street narrows, and Stefano stops beside Mario's boat. Rose watches him uncover the boat and load his easel and paint box, and realizes they've become real friends, while just this morning they were formal acquaintances.

The boat is a pretty wooden one. Although it's old, it's well made, with gold trim near the bow, and Rose feels comfortable climbing aboard. She settles down in the center seat and Stefano sits at the stern.

"Well, here we are sitting in the middle of a painting," she tells him, accepting a glass of chianti, which she holds carefully as the boat rocks gently while Stefano sits back down.

"Indeed! To sitting in the middle of paintings."

"And to painting," Rose toasts.

Odes 1:31

What should the poet ask from the gods of art?
What should he pray for, as he pours out
the sacrificial wine from the cup?

(Not for fertile grainfields in rich Sardinia,
for pleasant herds in hot Calabria,
for Indian gold and ivory,
for fields which the silent river Liris
nibbles away with quiet water.)

Let those whom Fortune has given vines prune them
with a silver scythe, let the rich trader drain
golden cups of wine purchased with the profits of
Syrian trade. Those are dear to the gods
who safely and assuredly have re-sailed
the Atlantic Ocean three or four times.

But my fare is olives and endives and easily
digested mallows. Therefore, Apollo, god of poetry,
grant, I pray, that I may enjoy in good health
and with a sound mind what I have,
and not live out a foul and fruitless old age.

Carmina 1:31

Quid dedicatum poscit Apollinem
vates? Quid orat de patera novum
fundens liquorem? Non opimae
Sardiniae segetes feracis,

non aestuosae grata Calabriae
armenta, non aurum aut ebur Indicum,
non rura quae Liris quieta
mordet aqua taciturnus amnis.

Premant Calena falce quibus dedit
Fortuna vitem, dives et aureis
mercator exsiccet culillis
vina Syra reparata merce,

dis carus ipsis, quippe ter et quarter
annon revisens aequor Atlanticum
impune: me pascunt olivae,
me cichorea levesque alvae.

Fruit paratis et valido mihi,
Latoe, dones et, precor, integra
cum mente nec turpem senectam
degere nec cithra carentem.

—Horace, *Odes 1:31*,
translated by
L.L. Lee
Bellingham, Washington

“And, to the sea,” he says.

“To the sea,” she agrees.

Rose peers over the edge of the boat and looks into the water. There are so many colors: pink and purple, azure, opal and rose, blues of every shade, even black. Could Feebi paint these colors? Should she buy some pastels and let Feebi rub the colors into the paper with her fingers? Water color would be too difficult, with the mixing and brushes and water. Too confusing. Acrylic? No, there would be a problem getting the caps off the tubes.

“Indigo,” Stefano says. “My favorite color. See it here, in the darkest parts.”

“Every color is there it seems,” she says, peering down at the sea beside them while they eat sections of orange.

“Every color, every sound, every year. Everything is in there,” Stefano says, finishing his wine. He stops to slice the cheese and hands Rose a hefty chunk.

“I see myself. You,” Rose says. “Good cheese.”

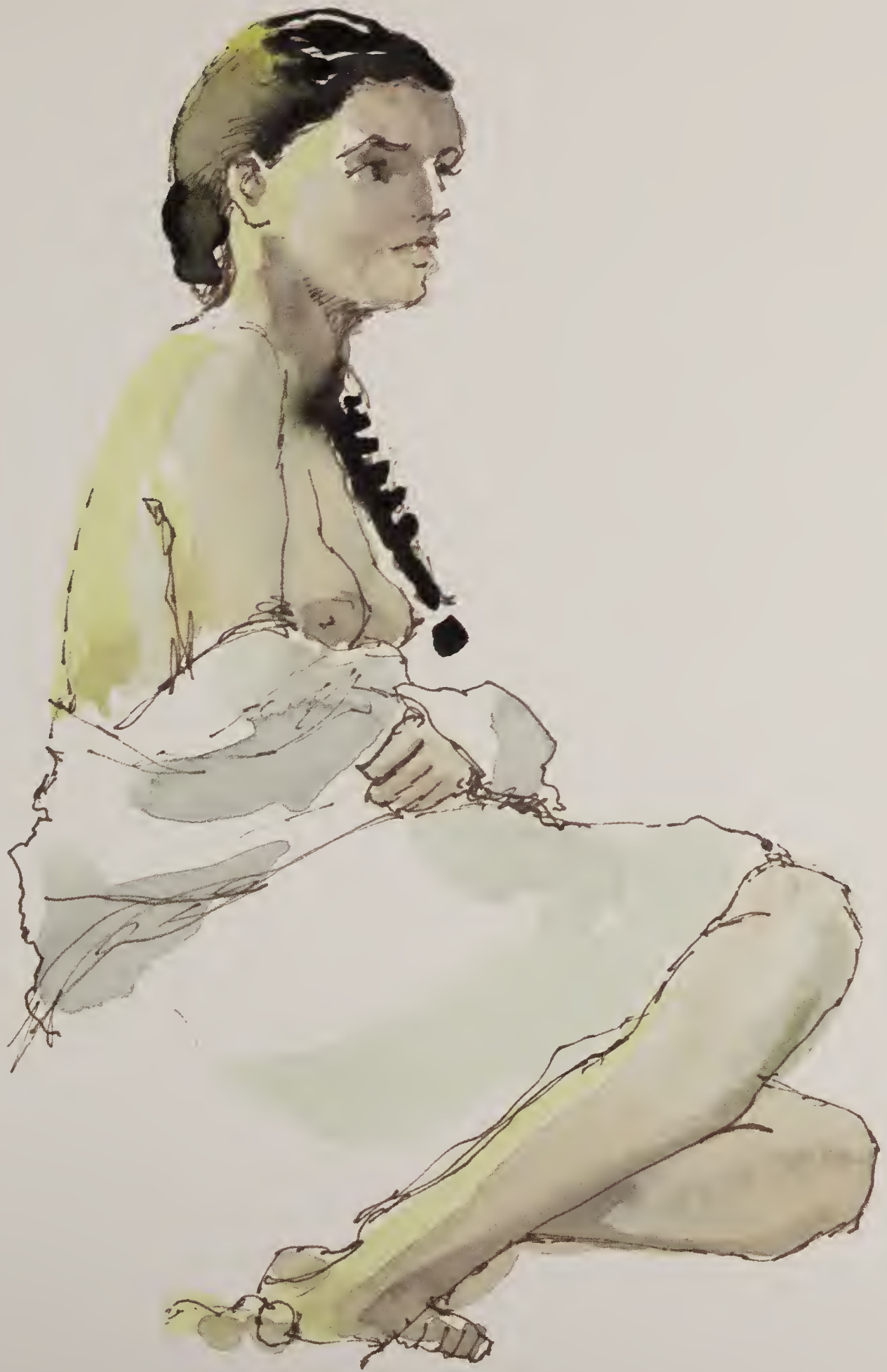
“Pirates knew this sea, this same water. St. Mark’s bones. Poets. Everyone. Excellent cheese.”

“My Feebi, too. She’s there. The water took her. Left me a shell, a sweet pink shell.” Rose drops an orange peel into the water and

watches it float, then snatches it back, setting it on the seat beside her.

Sitting upright again, she sees Stefano has started to sketch. Rose recognizes her profile looking over the side of the boat. Without putting down his pen, Stefano hands her a sketch pad and puts the cigar box full of colored pencils between them. Without hesitation, as if offered a ripe plum, Rose begins to draw.

*Konnie M. Ellis lives in
Aurora, Colorado.*



Dale Fleming

Watercolor by Dale Fleming
Skylark 1999



Poem for myself

I know it, folks, those I have loved,
loving me was a curse.
My women, I have estranged myself,
my children became far-off people,
and my friends died without a trace.

And yet, believe me since I love life,
I would rather leave life alive
like the grazing herd the horizon surrounds,
than to grow old in a princely grave
where I can stare at my vast past
swallowed up in the deep caves of the clouds.

I want to welcome myself again with open arms
in a house that smiles with music
or in a garden flooded by pure maidenwater
far away from weeping with mistaken tears,
far away from grief and from the sea of rain.

—*From "Welcome in my Underworld"*
(1978), this poem by Paul Snoek
has been translated by
Kendall Dunkelberg from
Columbus, Mississippi

Gedicht voor mezelf

Ik weet het, mensen, die ik heb bemind,
het was een straf mij lief te hebben.
Mijn vrouwen heb ik zelf ontvreemd,
mijn kinderen werden verre mensen
en mijn vrienden gingen spoorloos dood.

En toch, geloof mij, want ik heb het leven lief.
Ik heb het leven liever te verlaten levend,
als de grazende kudde omringd door de verte,
dan te verjaren in een prinsengraf,
waar ik mag staren naar mijn groot verleden,
verzwonden in de diepe grotten van de wolken.

Ik wil mezelf opnieuw gastvrij ontvangen
in een huis dat glimlacht van muziek
of in een tuin bevoeid door zuiver meisjeswater,
ver weg van het geweest met de verkeerde tranen,
ver weg van het verdriet en van de regenzee.

Lowering Will Survive Us

The heavy clarity of winter light
Presses against the mood we thought was safe.
The rigor of the dusk becomes a dream,
Security weightless as threadbare coats.

Weather welcomes the strongest possibility,
That lowering will survive us after all,
But keep me back a single drop of rain,
The thought of it will give my memory breath.

—*Sandra Fowler*
West Columbia, West Virginia

the taste of being

life is a glorious
frightening moment;
sometimes it hurts;
it twists and turns
through a pathless woods

there is no wind
and no birds sing

everything is a direction
and there is no direction
there is pain

there is joy and glory,
the extraordinary taste
of being and existence,
the measure
of latitudes
and longitudes,
the apple and the salamander,
the shadow
that space throws
across the universe

there is the warmth of sun
folding around us

there is you

—*Charles B. Tinkham*
Gary, Indiana



A Couple of Hours Was All it Was *for Bob*

The afternoon seemed long in Riverside.
Over a hundred degrees and we alone sat at the veranda table.
Vacation and my wife's uncle sitting next to me.
Parkinson made him thinner and more unsteady from last year.
I heard in his voice his old profession—
chalk squealing on the blackboard,
the soft pad of the eraser sweeping over algebra
after the last class.

In my voice I had the sense of failure as a student.
A couple of hours was all it was.
At one time as his voice grew weaker and slower,
and the first California darkness settled on the edges
of the cascading hibiscus, I leaned closer.
I noticed his hand on the arm of my chair.
As I listened I thought of it as a bridge,
and with his faint, eager words we walked across it.

—Robert P. Cooke
Highland, Indiana

My Nose

My face has grown some wrinkles
My hearing's not so good
Can't read without my glasses
I tire before I should.

But the coffee pot's aroma
The scent of coming rain
The heaven of bread baking
Vanilla cheers my brain!

Honeysuckle mornings
The sweetness of a rose
Of one thing I am certain
What still works, is my nose.

—Laura Ruben
Hammond, Indiana

Poetry, a Foreign Language

Sitting here, trying to think great thoughts,
A dilettante looking for a muse,
I long to breathe that rarefied air,
To seek out Prometheus.
Long interludes of mediocrity,
Punctuated by rare spikes of brilliance
Which, while passing through space,
Occasionally get snagged in my head.
1969 seems to mark the resting place of my brain.
From sparks of genius to felonious stupidity
I continue to use the same words as I write—
Only each day they come out in a different order.
Meter, verse, rhyme, rhythm, syntax, structure—
Esoteric meanings, frustrating dry spells—
I think I wrote something last night—
Now I can't remember — brain catatonic.
I consider it a victory if, while reflecting each evening,
I am no better, no worse, than yesterday—
Only another day older.

—Dave McCullom
Highland, Indiana

Open?

Who? Me?
Well, yes,
to a degree.

I am open
to your help,
but not to your advice;

to your religion,
but not your politics;

to your life style
and even your music,
unless it's too loud,
too long
or forced on my telephone ear
after your recording
tells me to hold the line;

to the way you dress,
but not the way you drive,
especially if you steal
my handicapped parking space;

to the way you talk,
except when you use expressions
that grate on me like, "impact"
as a verb, or "family values,"
or "law and order."
I prefer "influence,"
"affect," "living wage,"
"justice and rights."

I am open to your poetry,
as long as you're kind to mine,
and even to your criticism,
if it's gently put,
although I can accept it too,
when you just sit there and say nothing.

I am open to your prose,
but remember, I'm narcoleptic,
and tend to fall asleep,
No fault of your writing.

And I am open to your forgiveness,

I hope you're open to mine.

—John Sheehan
Portage, Indiana

The Magician's Prophecy

My magician's prophecy catches civilization.
My mouth is dry because of so much prayer.
The nightmare of summer heat is long
And difficult to endure.
I thank the dream merchants.
They guide my heart of flower.

My dreams are a serial of joy.
The full moon brings the scent
Of the prairies. . .
My poems of anger and weeping
Have all gone into the fire.
I have no regrets about words
That agitate my dreaming.

I prefer dreaming to words
Of rebellion. . .
This makes me release words
To the murmuring winds.
The echoes sound primitive
And wild across the fields.
The prairie-flower fortunes
Gather in the tempest.
Winds scrape the paragon dreams
And I wish for a civilized angel!

—Jesus Gutierrez
East Chicago, Indiana

Desert Rain

Haiku Sequence

In dry desert winds
Storm rains are like mirages—
No trace but cracked mud.

When desert rains stay,
Lands bloom, come alive with beasts—
Even frogs revive.

Barrel cactus gorge,
Air is sweet, clean and humid—
Bees make sweet commerce.

Day is golden bright,
Night, midnight blue velvet coat—
Countless bright buttons.

Tomorrow more sun,
Ponds dry, become silent mud—
No predicted rain.

—Henry White
Crown Point, Indiana





medicine

for Chancellor Steven Beering

it is a sense
of devotion
to what
God has made

it is holy
and holistic

it is the conviction
that nerve, muscle,
heart, bone, and blood
are not many
but are one and indivisible

it is founded
on the concept
of absolute confidentiality

it defies disease and pain
and discomfort
and anxiety

it conceives of nucleus,
cytoplasm, cell wall,
and chromosome
as the most potent
of all empires

it believes
that each patient
is an individual
and must be treated
individually

it does not stop
at half-measures

it also honors
the soul,
since the body
is the house
of the soul

it pays attention
to the rhythms
of life,
the incomparable
music of human existence—
sleeping, waking,
the pulse,
the egg,
systole, diastole

it is to know
what sympathy is

it is to practice sympathy

it is to understand
the loyalty
to the ideal of health
as Hippocrates
carries it out—

it is to comprehend
the meaning of love

—Charles B. Tinkham
Gary, Indiana

Winter Sun

wake me to the warmth of your winter sun
my heart is bitter cold to anything
but your golden rays of radiance

thaw my love
let its liquid flow out
ice dissolves in the power of your heat

I stretch my stiff arms to meet sunlit sky
in the hope my icy tomb will melt away
and beads of water will drench me
in the joy of you, goddess sun

—Gordon Stamper, Jr.
Highland, Indiana

Circle Dance

From Yemen to Middle Europe
they've gathered,
deep olive skin tones
blended with buffed peach,
dark curly hair
meshed with straight blond.
They rise from a table
of hummus and pita,
chopped liver and rye,
drink one more toast
to the secular Sabbath.
In long skirts and short ones,
corduroys and jeans,
in t-shirts and turtlenecks and vests,
they circle dance,
these women and men
with their arms interwoven
and their feet pressed firmly
into ancient Hebrew rhythms
on the proud shores of Tel Aviv.

—Sandra Goldsmith
Chicago, Illinois



IT'S NOT THE MONEY

by Elaine Hatfield



ome people like to fight," Pete said, "but not me."

Mattie said exactly the same thing: "Some people like to

fight"

It wasn't that Pete wasn't tempted to have it out with her. He'd been putting up with his Aunt Mattie's insults for more than two years. But he hadn't said anything. Yet

When he was a kid, Mattie had been nice enough. She had no kids of her own and so she spent a lot of time with Pete and his older brother, T. Arthur. A couple of times a month, Mattie would take them to Hippo's, Chuckie Cheese's, or Tombstone Pete's. Mattie showered them with weird and wonderful presents on New Year's, Valentine's Day, Easter, birthdays, Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Christmas, and Kwanzaa. Any excuse. Separate but always equal.

But the moment T. Arthur and Pete graduated from college, all that changed. T. Arthur went on to Northwestern Medical School and Pete went on to Levin Law, admittedly a second-class operation. Since then, Mattie had been playing favorites: T. Arthur was the hero. He was too penny-ante to notice. She penned fond little notes to T. Arthur; Pete never heard from her. (Oh, now and then she'd scrawl "Happy Birthday!" on a *Peanuts* card and toss it in the mail with a minuscule check, but that was about it.) She sent T. Arthur packets of books (*Newton's Madness*, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife For a Hat*, *How We Die*, and *Death to Dust*, just to name a few). She never sent Pete anything. Oh, she sent him these insulting jokes:

Q. Why won't sharks attack lawyers?

A. Professional courtesy.

Q. Why do they bury lawyers under 20 feet of dirt?

A. Because deep down, they're really good people.

Q. What does a lawyer use for birth control?

A. His personality.

Apparently it never occurred to her that it was rude to jeer at someone's chosen profession. And, of course, she sent the great T. Arthur several thousand each year to cover his expenses; Pete was left in the lurch. Mattie seemed to delight in grinding Pete under her sling-back, three-inch heels.

For more than two years, Pete'd been pushing his mom and dad to admit what was going on. He'd tried everything. Whined. Reasoned. Begged and pleaded. Shouted. Slammed his fists down on the table. Zero. Out to lunch. They didn't do a thing. Tough luck. That was their attitude. Then, Pete issued an ultimatum: insist Mattie treat me right or else. Finally, his mom said she'd call Mattie and try to find out what was going on.

* * *

When Mattie got Rose Marie's telephone call, she was stunned. For a moment, she couldn't believe what she was hearing.

"Why that little brat!" Mattie thought. All the time T. Arthur and Pete were growing up. All the sacrifices she'd made! All those ghastly dinners. Chuckie Cheese's: Patiently listening to those damn Chic Chicks clucking out "Shake, Rattle, and Roll." Tombstone Pete's: Fake gunplay crackling like strings of drunken firecrackers. And everywhere, wild hordes of clinging, screaming, sobbing, sticky, fighting, falling kids. The mere thought of it made her shudder.

And all those presents! Never late! Just off the top of her head, she bet she could tick off a couple hundred. Let's see. Early on, there'd been stuffed *Winnie the Pooh!* bears, swing sets, puzzles, and small-fry size *Tyrannosaurus Rexs*. Later on it was ... uh ... medieval manuscripts, trips to Disneyland, Blackstone the Magician magic tricks, *The Big Brain* series, *Mr. Science* chemistry sets (deluxe, of course), *Mad* magazine, Pelé soccer gear, racing bikes, in-line roller skates, antique steam engines, theatrical make-up (complete with false mustaches and beards), and fake snot. And even in col-

lege: private telephone lines and Macintosh PCs.

And obviously the little creep hadn't remembered any of it.

So, when Rose Marie began to grill her, Mattie could hardly contain herself. She felt like telling her to "Buzz off." She'd goddamn well spend her own money any way she liked. If the greedy little bastard didn't like it, tough! She wouldn't give anybody anything any more!

But Mattie loved Rose Marie and so took a deep breath and reined herself in. "Calm down," she cautioned herself. "Don't say things you'll be sorry for later." So, Mattie lied.

She said she was crazy about *both* the boys ... including the little creep.

She patiently set out to explain why she and her husband Max had sent T. Arthur more money than they'd sent Pete. "Maybe we were wrong, but we were thinking about it this way," she said. "It seemed to us that T. Arthur's situation was a lot more desperate than Pete's. Art's tuition is a lot higher: \$23,000 versus \$13,000 a year. He'll be in school a lot longer: seven years versus three. Art is already deeply in debt, with no prospect of digging himself out anytime soon. Pete will be a corporate lawyer by next year. He will probably be making ... what? ... say \$90,000 a year next year? That's more than Max and I make. So it seemed that for now, it was T. Arthur who needed a little extra help."



Of course," Mattie said, "if Pete is ever in real trouble, he can count on the two of us to be there for him, too. I bet it all evens out in the end," she added hopefully.

Mattie's voice was calm but she was having trouble choking back her fury. How dare Rose Marie interrogate her?

At the very end, Mattie's resentment spilled over. "Did Pete perchance have some sort of plan for how she and Max should go about setting things right? Some



sort of monthly payment plan? Perhaps a penalty to compensate for damages?" As soon as her venom slipped out, Mattie repented. "For God's Sake!" She could have kicked herself. "Cool it," she thought. "People are always a little nuts when it comes to their own kids. Quit it." Luckily, Rose Marie completely missed Mattie's sarcasm. She would check with Pete, she said.

* * *

As soon as Rose Marie hung up, she called Pete to tell him what his aunt had said.

Now it was Pete's turn to be furious. How could his mother be so stupid to let Mattie flim-flam her like that? Mattie had mocked his aspirations, insulted him, and deprived him of money that was rightfully his. And all his mother could say was, "She didn't mean it." He couldn't believe it.

Well, if his folks were too spineless to stand up for him, he'd just have to stand up for himself. He sat down at his Macintosh PC and pounded out a brief. After two or three false starts, he finally came up with something that let Mattie know he was on to her. He started out sweetly enough.

Dear Aunt Mattie:

I'd like to thank you & Uncle Max for your generous Christmas gift. I'd have written before, but I haven't had a moment to myself. I've been studying extremely hard. Levin is no cinch, you know. Your gift will come in handy. I have to pay for all my school expenses myself & so every little bit helps.

But as he wrote, paragraph by paragraph, his true feelings began to trickle, then flow, then gush out:

I think I ought to be honest with you. For quite some time, I've felt shabbily treated by you & Uncle Max. You've given T. Arthur tons of money. You've given me zilch. Until I basically forced my father & mother to face this issue, no one dared to ask questions. No one asked why you've chosen to insult me, neglect me, & starve me out. You've never explained to anyone why you're doing this.

You barely know me. You might be sincere, but how am I to know?

I want to make that clear that I'm *not* writing to ask for money. I might have accepted it once, but not now. I'm proud of the fact that I've paid my own way through law school *via* part-time jobs and huge student loans. Now, if you offered me money now, I wouldn't take it. It's too late.

What I refuse to accept are the "reasons" you gave my mom to justify your favoritism. I'm afraid your "logic" just won't wash. Just consider your "arguments":

- *Medical school costs more than law school.* That may be true, but right now T. Arthur and I are both living in dire penury. Both of us need money.

- *T. Arthur has to pay for five more years of medical school, while I will be earning big money in a prestigious law firm less than a year.*

Here, I have to disagree with you. Sure, I will probably get a great job next year ... and maybe the money *will* come rolling in, but that doesn't help me now, does it? What *might* happen is irrelevant.

How do you know I'll get a job, ever? Lots of young lawyers don't, you know. It is a dog-eat-dog world out there, in case you haven't noticed. Also, GPs make a lot more than corporate lawyers. All and all, I don't think that your reasoning was all that valid or correct.

I really wanted to write you a kind, giving, gentle letter. However, that has proven impossible. Again, it is *not* the money. It is your blatant indifference to the emotional impact of your actions. It is your refusal to explain. Are you insensitive? malicious? I do not know, but I do know that I am angry.

Pete ended by taking a stab at peace.

I do care for you, but I don't know what to think.

Pete

* * *

When Mattie got Pete's letter, she caught her breath. She couldn't quite take it all in. What did he mean "insensitive?" "malicious?"

She felt like she was in a state of suspended animation. Frozen.

Then she shook herself to attention. What was going on? Why was Pete so angry at her? When he was little, he had been crazy about her. He'd whoop with joy any time she came calling. "Auntie and treats!" What had gone wrong?

Mattie told herself to wait for a day or two until she was calm and could put this tiff in perspective. Then she sat down and crafted a conciliatory reply:

Dear Pete:

I was sorry to get your note. I'm confident that this is all a huge misunderstanding.

You said "I barely know you." That's true. Since you went off to college, we *have* drifted apart. But we have a long history together. When you and T. Arthur were small we used to go out to dinner at least once a month. Remember? Maybe it would be fun to resume them again. What do you think?

You said that you were hurt that Max and I hadn't confided in you re: our financial decisions, at least as they concern you. I can understand that. But try it from our perspective. Max and I have to make decisions all the time as to how much money, if any, we can afford to send to our folks, our brothers and sisters, and a couple dozen nieces and nephews. Of course it would be totally inappropriate and impractical for us to try to check all this out with you. We love you and T. Arthur and I can promise that in the long run, we'll treat both of you ... and everyone else ... fairly.

I hope we can get this friendship back on track. Let's get together and talk.

Love,
Aunt Mattie

When she was done, Mattie handed the rough draft to Max and asked him to take a look at it.

Max got as far as "I can understand that," before he hit the roof. Max was crazy-in-love with Mattie and couldn't stand to see her hurt. When passerbys were rude to her, he ached. When her family took her goodness for granted, he was incensed. He wanted to rip out their throats. She loved him for that.

"Oh, sweetheart," he said, "this note breaks my heart. It just won't do."

Max volunteered to take a whack at com-



posing a better reply. Mattie'd been groveling for forty years in a vain attempt to keep the peace, he reminded her, and look where it got her. What was required was a confident, honest, no-nonsense reply. Max sat down at his PC and composed.

Dear Pete:

We received your letter. We were tempted not to answer it, simply because it is the rudest, most insulting, and ill-tempered letter we've received in a very long time. It was filled with name-calling and vitriol. Its bottom line message, whatever the camouflage (and there wasn't much), was "I am enraged because you gave T. Arthur more money than me. I need money, too, and you should give me lots more. You are (and here the ugly name-calling begins) ... for not giving me more money." Etc.

We have just a few comments to make and then perhaps you can ponder your regrettable outburst.

- **Why T. Arthur?** Adult relationships are two-way streets. When people are warm, kind, and forthcoming with us, we are pushovers. T. Arthur has been such a person. He makes it clear that he likes us and we like him. He telephones and writes us a lot. He talks about his life and we talk about ours. We are good friends.

We have not gotten a similar reception from you. Your letters are rare, your phone calls non-existent, and more often than not we receive no response to our gifts—not even a postcard saying that they have arrived. You seem to take us for granted and regard presents as a birthright. As a child, that was bearable, but six years into adulthood, we sometimes feel that sending you money is like shoveling it down a rathole.

- **Why didn't we consult?** We were and are flabbergasted at being asked to explain our money-giving policies—policies which are nobody's business really but our own. Such questions are totally inappropriate. We are under no obligation to give any of you one penny, and it is quite brazen for anyone to advise us on how to

dole out our money. (*Max's note: You may perhaps have taken Mattie's generosity for granted, but I think it's worth pointing out that this Aunt has been amazingly and unusually generous to your whole family, and you, over the years. Aunts don't have to do that. Mattie is not a money machine.*)

- **What next?** We'd like to begin again. Let's have a relationship based on loving feelings and communication, where both sides make an effort.

On money issues, we have decided we shall continue to give birthday, graduation, and Christmas gifts as always, but for now no extras to T. Arthur or anyone else.

Because money contaminates relationships, we refuse to address issues of money ever again. Never again should we be asked to defend or explain our gift-giving (or non-giving) to you or anyone else in your family. Nothing should be expected, and if we choose to give anything, that is completely in our domain.

We wish you well in law school and hope we will hear from a more thoughtful and generous Pete some day.

Best regards,
Max and Mattie

When Mattie looked at Max's revision she didn't know what to say. She was, of course, touched by Max's obvious love. And to some extent, Max was right. No more groveling.

On the other hand, Max's letter was too strong, too harsh, too punitive. It could only cause trouble.

As always, Mattie tried to compromise. She carefully constructed a collage of both letters. She softened Max's rhetoric and hardened her heart. She sent the letter off and waited.

There was no response for several weeks.

* * *

It was on a Monday when Pete called. Mattie, it must be admitted, was not at her best. She'd caught a terrible cold. She had a headache, stuffy nose, and could hardly breathe, so it was hard to think. She was in the midst of a staff meeting, so she couldn't really talk, either. But, she didn't want Pete to think she was rejecting him and his call, so

she took it.

Pete, bless him, did start out with the best of intentions. He radiated good cheer. But lurking beneath the cheerful cadences were quivers of barely contained hurt and anger. It was a dangerous situation: Both of them were pretending to be calm, cool, and collected. Both were teetering on the verge of hysteria.

Pete began. he seized the moral high ground. *He* was, after all, the victim. Max and Mattie had tried to turn things topsy-turvy and he was determined to set them straight. He let fly his arrows:

- He was stunned that Mattie would show a personal letter, a private-for-her-eyes-only-letter, to someone, uh someone, like Uncle Max.

- How could she accuse him of being jealous of T. Arthur?! Nobody was closer than they were. If anything, T. Arthur was jealous of him.

- How could she accuse him of money grubbing? He had explicitly said he was not interested in her money. Hadn't she read anything?

- How could she say she cared for him? It had always been T. Arthur this, T. Arthur that. She had never once shown any concern for him ... his education ... or his career.

It was then that Mattie made a fatal mistake. Anyone with any brains would have let Pete talk. Until Pete had spewed out all his poison, there was no chance he could hear what she had to say.

But she couldn't help herself. Pete's ravening desperation was contagious.

She jumped the gun.

"You're just wrong," she fired back. "Remember when you first went to Illinois State? We all thought you were crazy, but you insisted. You wanted to be with your friends. Then, your first week, you realized you'd made a big mistake. You should have gone to Brown. You sent me this piteous note saying how much you hated ISU. The teachers were 'stupid,' your friends were 'stupid,' and the facilities 'stank.' Remember?"

He did.

"Max and I talked it over and wrote you this long letter saying that you were right, you *were* too good for ISU, and we urged you call Brown back and tell them to take back your turn-down. Remember? And Max offered to send you \$5,000 a year, if that's what it took. Remember?"

Pete didn't reply.



"You never answered. I was worried that my letter had gone awry. I was afraid you'd think I'd simply ignored your plea, so I left a message on your answering machine, repeating the offer. Remember?"

Again, no answer.

"At the time," Mattie continued, "I just sloughed it off. I decided that you'd probably had a change of heart. That by then you were probably caught up in the swirl of college life and had forgotten that you'd ever thought ISU was dim and dull. I was like that in college. Neglectful. So I didn't think anything more about it."

But she thought some more about it now. Why hadn't he written?

Pete lost it. He could no longer restrain himself. "That was the start of it," he said, bitterly, indicting her. She and Max had insulted him and his school. How dare she brand ISU a college for "second-raters?" Who was *she* to say something was second rate?

Mattie was stunned. "I didn't initiate the correspondence," she said, dumbstruck. "It was you! You wrote to *us*. Max and I were only trying to help.

Now she was totally confused. What was all this about? Why were they having a fight? Why was he insisting that she didn't like him? Of course she did. It didn't make sense. Was he jealous of T. Arthur? Was it the money?

For Pete, that was the last straw.

"Jealous! Greedy!" If that was the way Mattie felt, he guessed they'd better just end their so-called relationship right here.

"That's it. Done. *Finis*." In the unlikely event that he should ever decide that *he* wanted to reestablish communication, *he* would call *her*. Until then, she should consider all ties severed. He hung up.

After the call, Mattie sat benumbed ... paralyzed. This was ridiculous.

It was her fault. She should have let him talk. He was just a kid. Why couldn't she shut up?

She picked up her telephone and punched in his code. She'd say, "Let's start over."

She got his answering machine.

Mattie left a formal little message. This was silly. She had loved him for twenty four years. Why fight? Why didn't they meet for lunch at the Drake and talk. She could take the train in. How about ... The machine cut her off mid-sentence. Her message was too long.

She called back. This time the line was busy. She kept trying for a few hours, but each time she got a busy signal. Pete had taken his phone off the hook.

Well, piss on it, she thought. If he wants to fight, let him. Let the little snot call her.

* * *

Ten years later, the feud was still blazing. On New Year's, Easter, weddings, christenings, birthdays, bar mitzvahs, graduations, Thanksgivings, and Christmas ... all the family celebrations ... Mattie and Pete met. Pete studiously avoided Mattie. He made sure everyone noticed. He wanted to make it clear to everyone that he was a man of pride and firm intention. "Never again!"

croaker

punk of the pond
frog is gloss boss
casting reflections in all directions
spitter of the fittest
lunch muncher around the clock
king of croaks
tongue in cheek,
frog's jokes
are no laughing matter
to the midnight patter
of dragonfly's cousins and aunts
always hip on his amphibious strip,
check out frog's designer
non-fade, non-shrink threads
guaranteed to attract the ladies
puffy on pads
anticipating a friendly poke

—Stephen Kopel
San Francisco, California

Mattie's style was different. She was the Snow Queen. Unfailingly polite, with a courtesy designed to chill to the bone.

When hoar frost met molten fury, Pete would stride away. At teas and receptions, while everyone else was trying unsuccessfully to balance tea, cookies, and tiny cucumber sandwiches on wobbly knees, Pete would stand directly across from

Mattie, eyes narrowed, blazing with hate, arms crossed against her. Not for him tea, sandwiches, and cookies.

Once, Mattie had closed into herself at the idea of a family fight. But war is seductive. Abhorrence gives way to resignation; acceptance to amused anticipation. In time Mattie began to rather look forward to the skirmishes. Pete's over-the-top performances *were* comical. And what did the battle of wills cost her? Nothing. By now she could foretell Pete's reaction; their inevitability brought a smile. First, the superior, self-satisfied curl of the lip, then the haughty toss of the head, finally the disdainful frown. She could hardly keep from laughing. She took a certain gleeful pleasure in calculating how much she and Max had saved that year by Pete's refusal to accept any presents that came from "them." At least \$3,000. Sometimes Mattie and Max took wicked delight when drawing and redrawing their imaginary wills. How Mattie'd enjoy the confidential conferences with the lawyers. Max could just envision Pete's face when he heard their wills. She hated to fight, but if she was going to be forced into battle, she might as well enjoy it.

* * *

I hate to fight, Pete thought, but I was forced into it. I'm glad I took a stand, he thought. He was proud of himself. He'd proven he was a man. Mattie had tried to humiliate and humble him, but he had prevailed. His parents had buckled, but not he. Mattie had tried to bribe him into shutting up, but again he had prevailed. She should have known better. He tried to tell her. Money was nothing to him.

"I hate to fight," Mattie said to Max, "but I don't see what else we could have done." She loved Max for loving her. And she was proud of herself. She had simply refused to let Pete humiliate and humble her. He had tried to intimidate her but she had stood fast. She was a bit disappointed in her family. They hadn't stood up for her. They'd stayed silent. Out of it. But never mind. You can't have everything.

Pete and Mattie looked at their engagement calendars. Both looked ahead to the next family gathering with anticipation.

*Elaine Hatfield lives
in Honolulu, Hawaii.*

Sequence

Pouring out tea
for the local letter carrier
in a dream sequence
he tells me
how much poetry of mine
he carries in the sack
to stations of the world
with question mark addresses
and the handwriting of a boy.

His laughter meets
my melancholy
staring at voluminous mail
my boiling cup trembles
as if more frightened
than God alone knows
wondering if my driven night visions
of human speech
will ever reach their destination.

—B. Z. Niditch
Brookline, Massachusetts

Small

Small horses, small conquistadors,
grabbed continents for kicks.
Small favors from small ancestors
mortar our fortune's bricks.
Small robots keep industry cheap.
Small things created the present.
I fail to know why on tiptoe,
she finds five-foot-two unpleasant.
Small things run with bigger ones,
just by running faster.
Small wonder strength comparisons
show them to be master.
Small engines last; small charge,
large blast.
Small coal burns more and burns
brighter.
Don't theorize the crater's size,
by that of the dynamiter.

—john whitehead
Miami, Florida



Illustration by Steve Cartwright

Voice

When we were young
we crossed paths and headed
to those purple passion futures
we so thought we needed.
The vines of the years wrapped
over and under our days,
the distant rumors of wars
came close as we had never dreamed.
We dropped wishes
like pebbles, randomly,
without knowing there was a way
outside this tight cocoon
we had woven round ourselves.
Now, though, a promise of room,
all that vast space we traveled,
to the ends of a great continent,
has opened what may be we once hoped
(do I even remember) has voice,
so soft,
but maybe,
just this once
we might hear
this voice
this voice
still so young.

—Carol Hamilton
Midwest City, Oklahoma

"Daddy, is He a Monster?"

A child caught sight of me on a bus
propped up on his seat
safe within his father's fold
he said,
"Is he a monster?"

My head
poking out of a protective shell of newspaper
a suspicious crab
peering at a threatening predator
my blood-shot eyes squinting
behind a shield of dark glass.
The top of my head
void of hair
shining under an aura of artificial light
from the vehicle.
An unruly beard
sprouted
tinted with gray
from my flushed cheeks.

I forced a smile
the child screamed
and disappeared behind his seat.

—Doug Holder
Somerville, Massachusetts



Empty Buses

I must have fallen asleep, for just a moment, on the bus ride to work that morning. When I opened my eyes, I found that I was alone. The seats were all empty. Even the driver was gone. But the bus still rolled along as usual, up one street and down another, making its appointed rounds. I thought this strange but the streets were filled with empty buses like this one chugging along as usual among the driverless cars, the riderless bicycles, past the endless rows of abandoned buildings with "For Sale" signs in all the windows. . .

And above it all, the soft blue of a birdless sky.

—Thomas Wiloch
Canton, Michigan

Dad

You always said, "Be Careful"
when I left the house
and I responded by acting
defiant, telling you
I wasn't a baby that needed
to be told to be careful.
You still said, "Be Careful"
the very next time even
when I just took my
bicycle a few houses away.
"Yeah. Sure," I replied,
sounding cool, indifferent.
Now I understand what
you meant when you said
"Be Careful," it's still
your way of expressing
you love me.

—Lois Green Stone
Pittsford, New York



Polar Bear at the Zoo

Showtime



No longer is there time
for hours of introspection
but merely a succession
of hastily given performances
and the endless cleaning up
afterward. . .

—Robert Stokes
Decatur, Illinois

On his back legs,
nose up, he stands
like he's in a ballet.
Arctic nights—does he
think of them now

as people toss popcorn
and peanuts? Do
flashbulbs remind him,
briefly, of northern lights
swirling over jagged
ice islands? He turns

his back to us. We head
for vipers and cobras.
Others take our place.

He's still dancing,
snowbirds taking off
in the tundra
of his eyes, midnight
sun on paw pads.



—Kenneth Pobo
Folson, Pennsylvania

Cristina Playing

Miami Beach, 1994

She is playing with her dolls
and making them into the kind
of people that exist in her world:
they do not scream or shout,
their faces do not know the meaning of hatred.
They do not remember past offenses
nor keep a record of bad experiences.
Her world is filled with a burst of light
that overcomes shadows and darkness.

She is dancing with the wind in her hair,
her body swaying with each melody.
In her world there are no set personalities:
she can be anyone she wants to be
and when she chooses to be a ballerina
and bows gracefully before me,
her small hands holding the sides of her dress,
I become a participant in her world,
acting like a child and dancing with her.

—liony batista
Miami, Florida



Illustrations by Erika Salatiello

The Immigrant's Daughter

Whale Songs

Their sorrowful song
touches my soul,
calms me,
bathes me in salt water
like an infant in a womb.
I swim beside my mother
blind.
I still find her voice
in the ocean,
in depths, in shallows I hear,
I am near.

—Diane Webster
Delta, Colorado

Generations rise
into her young face—
an old, old grace,
and deep dark eyes
sparked with surprise
at her place.

—Anne Selden
Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania



Hemangioma

Strawberry Mark

Strawberries are picked
on hot June mornings
when cicadas thrum the grass.
This is not a strawberry,
this scarlet blotch on my baby's
white thigh.

She shrieks and those cells
glow, throb rhythmically
to her moans.

I want to pluck
them from the vine,
pinch this intrusion,
bruise it blue.

I wish I could tell her
someday a lover will touch
those scars, make her forget her pain.
She curls her fist, places a ripe
thumb inside her mouth,
bites down.

—Rosalie Petrouske
Lansing, Michigan

That Snake

I'm not entirely sure I like my status
as pariah. You've heard that suspect tale
about some greedy woman and an apple,

I expect. But just watch . . . a casual flex
of muscle and my whole length forms an S-shape
as I glide—now isn't that a lovely motion?

And my color; green as springtime grass,
or rosy coral striped with black; even dull
brown rattlesnakes are diamonds, diamonds

from their flat heads (lethal, I admit) down
to those courteous rattles. Still—to see horror
rise in human eyes when I merely shift my head

or flick my tongue or drape myself serenely
from a branch . . . I think I'd miss that if I were
a soft-eyed doe, chipper bluebird, squishy toad.
Power is addictive, is it not?

—Joanne Kennedy
Williamsburg, Virginia



PALIMPSEST

by Earl M. Coleman

The dirt is cold and clammy, clings to my skin like last week's coffee grounds. He was a contender, I have to grant him that. Always panting after the possibilities of Making It, like he had it treed at last, and always falling short of biting it by just that half an inch. Could have sworn he hated the idea of burial, the claustrophobia of the box, and wanted to go up the flue, insubstantial to the end. You'd think he'd get that right at least, with so much wrong.

Did he ever learn the music of the days and nights? Or thrill to them? He never stopped, ear cocked. Racing, ever racing, like they had a clock on him.

I could have done without that deathbed scene. Why now? Why stab me with a goodbye speech? To demonstrate that he knew something I didn't already know? It wasn't so. His murky way. He was a specialist in murk—a generalist in everything else.

Embarrassing, the lack of folks around the grave. Who'd come? He managed to be rough on all of us, friends, family, business associates. He claimed tough love. May be. Even Robbie isn't here. His only grandchild. Ruth must have sent a notice to him. Come to think of it, I haven't called Robbie in months. Still, he's my son, what's wrong with him giving *me* a call, hiya pop, what's happenin' pop? I fought for him. He owes me that much for my pains.

Pretty day, the red leaves whirling like dust devils in the feeble sun, season dying, pop gone. What I remember is his high-flown arrogance, his pompous gravity, when easily he always could be blown away. And was. Debris. Old news. Ruth dressed in green, still solitary, weeping at the hole. The rabbi's gone. A rabbi? Grave? Pop was an atheist. Who did him in like this? Ruth?

I never grasped the two of them. A girlie young enough to be his kid. Come on! I think he could have had his pick. Why her? He was a star, well maybe just a meteor, until mom died. Was mom the power of his

throne? Why marry Ruth? Mom's death? This disembodied loner dreading loneliness? The reasons why—all murk. His luck held anyway—one massive stroke, twenty hours later—dead. No better mode than that. What was he—84? I hope he left his genes to me. I'm probably not even in his will.

Confession he was good at, took him off the hook, but his dying words to me the night he kicked were weird, shook me, hurt me. Bring up something almost thirty years ago? Thinking what? That something was revealed? That wasn't it. More murk. The confession was a subterfuge as usual. His own agenda.

Even the lullabies he sang to me—to hear himself of course! What was I—eight? We'd go to Sheep Meadow. Up on the rock. He'd put an arm around me but he wasn't really there. A kid can tell. The sun would bake me but I'd be cold straight through. Where was he really? Home with Sara? Nah. Planning raids against a rival publisher? He never planned. Shot from the hip. Then where? Inside his angst, free-floating angst? Stasis in the Doldrums, the Sargasso Sea of Lost? Gnawing at the eely strands of doubt that whispered he might truly not exist? My shoulders acting as his anchor, the shoulders of an eight year old, me placing him in time and circumstance when he was what I needed, him, his fathering, to nail me to my fragile eight year self. The fuck. Who needs a self-involved Prometheus to be your pop?

Aunt Shirley always *comme il faut*. What could she have threatened in order to get Joe and Kenny to yank themselves away from their big-time bucks to stand around a hole? They didn't know him much. Who did? And yet he made a mark as he would say. How did he manage that, that non-existent Aeolian bag of winds, woke up each morning winging it? Ben pegged it in his haiku at a business roast—"Bob Meyers: his greatest invention is himself." If we all have fifteen minutes pop had more. Twenty tops, but still.

Waiting's not my greatest thing, but anyway I must condole with Ruth, and all that shit but not just yet. What will she do now, bright and fifty? She'll be rich. I think she truly loved him, don't know why. Maybe the excitement of tableaux, a shifting scenery. When you're a cipher, inventing some persona that can pass for you if only fleetingly each day, like pop, then there's activity at least which might be seen as whirls of action, go, go, go. She met him when? When she was just a kid. We're on an age. What great thing did he have to offer her except the power that he had right then, world traveler. Turned straight to writing when he sold his company. Writing! To compete with me? Not let me have possession of my tiny treasure undisturbed—he had so much? Of course he'd written on and off for years. He even tried to make a go of it before he and Sara concentrated long enough to conceive me or got me in a fit of madness or abstraction, neither of them suited—self-abnegation, bringing up a kid. Then he went into publishing because he had to make a buck.

His current writing—go from piece to piece, poems, stories, try to find his voice, the true, authentic him. Not there. At least I am. You always know it's me. It's *me*. I bust my ass. I *have* a voice. I have to settle for the little mags.

You catch glimpses of what passes for his soul in words. But only glimpses. Yet he gets published in the mainstream big-time mags. The media. He's never really on the mark but comes real close. In writing—everything. And that's for someone never there, who isn't even fictional, a nullity.

And when he *was* there—murk. In his office—snowy afternoon, a scene from Mamet without the scatology—the prude. "Pop," I say to him, "Gloria's got Robert, claims she owns half my house. I pay her \$200 a month in child support. I think she abuses him. She spends the money on herself, hair, nails, what-all. What do I do?"

You'd think he'd treat my real-life drama



like there was a human, emotional crisis going on, like he recognized my *cri de coeur*. His glasses glinted like a gnome, that pompous look, half Hairbreadth Harry, half Felix Rohatyn. He says, "What lever do you have, Mel?" Like this is some mega LBO.

"Put like that there is—a lever. She wants to buy a loft—the one thing that she wants and doesn't have—and has no money."

"How much?"

"\$7500."

"You have \$7500?"

"Yes."

"Buy Robert for \$7500. For the same check get her to sign a quit-claim on the house."

"What are you saying, pop—she'd sell Robert?"

"Yes. She has no interest in kids."

"Her son? You think she'd sell her son? I'm supposed to tempt her with the money, pop, like I'm the fucking snake? You make me sick."

"He's your son, too. You'll be doing good, not bad. What's wrong with that?"

"So what's your grand scenario?"

"You write the quit-claim. My lawyers will check it out. Visit with her. Maybe lunch if you believe you can pull it off without a fight. Remember that. No fight. Wave the check for \$7500 under her nose. She delivers Robert to you, hands you the signed quit-claim. You stick Robert upstairs and give her the check. You never see her again. Robert is yours."

He's speaking as though money is his mouth, his hard-on is a sword, like this is about possession, revenge, when it's about my anguish, about her child-abuse. I do it anyhow, the way he says. To my astonishment she agrees to sell Robert to me. Agrees! Her son! A week later, she delivers the quit-claim to me, the door remaining open, the cold air whooshing in, the cab waiting outside, motor running, Robert now

beside me, a breathless rush of one, two, three—world spinning, much too fast. As it turns out, unforeseen, 'cause this is not a script but bleeding human beings, I start to yell at her, call her whore, the bitch she is and suddenly she grabs the check out of my hand, yanks Robert by the arm, runs out to the cab and they're gone. Pop hadn't thought of that possibility—that's for sure. He didn't always think of everything.

I go to him with the backfired result for sympathy and advice. What am I, twenty-six, seven? And yet I've read a face or two. No love, affection, empathy in his. Instead a look that says it's me who's fucked up. What did he think I was—an automaton, a blood-

The Awakening

The constant questions
coming at me
continuously make me
rethink everything
I thought I knew
for you make me
see a whole new
fresh vista
of the vast world
working your miracles
stirring me from
my deep sleep
of selfishness
opening my eyes
can't be myopic
for you make me
see beyond
my own horizon
rousing me to
the huge world
of responsibility
for I do worry
now that I am
consciously aware
for the first time of
what needs to be done
for you make me
rise above myself
through the sheer
power of your spirit.

—Charles Portolano
Setauket, New York

less, emotionless shell like him? I'd been a person, all I'd been.

Couldn't say as much for him. Or Sara either, come to that. I go back what—what am I, twenty-one? I come to them. "I need your help," I say. "Sandy's pregnant. We've decided on an abortion. I've got the money. What we need is somewhere she can stay after the operation. I offered this apartment. That OK?"

He looks at me with his fucking superior look. "You said Sandra? The one who got you into drugs?"

"Come on, pop, I did dope long before I met Sandy."

"I stand corrected. Hey, that's great. Great. Do the two of you push to keep the habit up or are you users only? Did you get good and goozy before you fucked your brains out and forgot protection?"

Sara. "Bob, Bob. Mel's in trouble here." She saw that at least. Her, trying to look motherly. "Abortion isn't legal, Mel. Is there another possibility?" *Legal*, when I'm in doo-doo to my ass.

"A lot's not legal, mom. It's the only way. We've talked it through, the two of us. A simple operation, really. A procedure, nothing more. There should be no complications at all. She needs a place after, to get some TLC."

"I understand what you're saying, Mel. But suppose there *are* complications?"

"I don't dig where you're coming from."

"There frequently are complications, Mel. You're asking your father and me to be complicitous in what you're doing, Mel. Illegal acts. Don't look like that. It is. Illegal. You see that, don't you? Your father and I haven't been consulted, don't know the doctor, whether he's skilled or not. There's only your judgment that we have to go on."

Imagine that. "So, it's my judgement. So?"

"You're not hearing your mother, Mel. You think your judgment has been wonderful? It hasn't been. What did it take to talk to us



before? Now you want us to be accessories to a crime. What next? She comes here. Bleeds all over the place. Needs to be taken to the hospital. Police. It may sound cruel, Mel—that's life. Remember your La Fontaine. You've been singing? Dance now."

The fuck. And she abetted him. Agreed. And we were altogether on our own, Sandy and I. And bleed she did. And to a hospital she had to go. She recovered but it was a mess. So what if it turned out like they said? They were my parents, no? Never there for me. Not him for sure. Not even Sara. And yet when Sara died I cried for her. Anyway. I gave her that. I can't for him. Was it perspective that they lacked? Too closeted inside their own cocoon to peer beyond the warp, step out into the world, the changing world?

Setting aside the rage, the heartache of the moment itself, it always takes eons to get over all the shit. After the fiasco with Gloria and pop's reaction and then my letting Gloria keep the money and move into the house with Robbie while I moved out, I just never called him I was so unnerved. Ten months, maybe more before we had a lunch and I could show him my new place on 3rd Street B and C. Was there a doubt he'd hate it? Hardly any. Drug headquarters. Steel barricaded windows front and back. And him a wing-tip, collar stay, hollow man. All these liberals. Booze is fine. Say horse or coke or show a shuttered door and they go ape.

He didn't disappoint. His glasses twinkled peering into corners for a rathole or my stash, left over panties, who knows what? Said nothing. Didn't have to say. I knew.

Then weirdest of the weirdnesses. I'd been smoking half the morning, trying to unwind—he calls. How are you and that shit and then my doorbell rings. I ask him can he hold and I go open up. It's Mike dropped by—he's on a scoring run for hash and we agree and when I finish I forget the phone. Just sack on out. Next thing I know there's pounding on the door. I think at first it's just my head. I open up jay naked, only dirty jockey shorts. There's Bob, my big-time publisher pop, and this creep accountant from his office and the sun could fry my skull and he's asking me am I OK, what,

what happened with the phone? I ask him did he have to bring his flunkey? Why not call the fuzz? He said he took it seriously, a neighborhood like this, when his son says hold the phone, answers a bell and doesn't return. Like just maybe something happened here. As though it wasn't perfectly clear these business types were slumming there at my expense, seeing how the other half lives, me scrawny, unprotected from their scrutiny, their scorn, their crawling question marks.

The Argument

A car is racing away,
a woman is crying into
her hands,
soft tires squeal,
dark lines stay behind.
Nothing is fastened
and he has packed up
the sun and sky,
stirred the wind.
Only the resonance of
shouting waits with her
in the empty street,
sadness drifting in
the opaque air.
But he will come back,
every night wrapped in
moonlight,
in pale angles of rain,
in quiet shadows crossing
the window,
his damp nomadic breath
and leech-sweet kisses
night after night
coming back.

—David Beard
Wichita, Kansas

That one took two years before I forgave him—not forgave, but let it slide so we could talk again.

And the accountant type who stole his business from him, spit him out? Do I have sympathy in me? For pop? He did his singing on the strength of what? Bravado? Will? Main chance? Hoist by his own petard. If he was looking back at it and wasn't in his skin what would he say? "That's life." That's life.

Who sees? Who's got the quality to step back from the mess and focus with a modicum of what? Shall we say clarity? Not him. That's why confession was so key to him, demanding it of others so he could punish them if only in his mind, quickly offering it himself so he could be exonerated, forgiven, before anyone could bring him to book, force him to atone, own up. He gave it up himself. The sneak, the octopus, pushing out his murky ink into the waters, clouding all.

Now there he was, three nights ago, quite stripped of everything as I had been that day he sought to shine a spotlight on my nudity. His cheeks were puffed and pale. He hadn't shaved, the stubble that there was, was gray. His eyes were Japanesey, drooped, the death mask placed, only the rales not started yet. His fingers long and knuckles knotted with arthritis, old man's hands. A short man, shrivelled under sheets and coverlet, deflated. What had been pouty lips now sunken to expose a stained front tooth. Quite insubstantial finally, giving up the ghost, his true identity, a wraith. He gestured weakly with his veined right hand. Ruth understood and left, leaving us together and alone, father and son. I bent to kiss him. Pasty forehead. I sat down.

"I wrote this end myself, Mel," he wheezed, whispered, struggled to aspirate. "The way to go. It's how I wanted it."

Imagine that, the fuck. Still arrogant. Cashing out his chips and arrogant, the life all gone.

"I'm glad it's how you want it pop. You always get your way."

"So how are you?" he mouthed, the words dispersing, so much smoke. "You're looking good. You're off the drugs. You see Robert often, keep in touch?"

The fuck was dying, still intent on running things, my life. "Everything is cool, pop. Cool."

"Cool," he whispered with what looked to be a smile his slack lips were trying to form. "A word. A nothing word. Cold, Mel. Things are cold."

"Need your blanket tucked?" I asked.



"My blanket?" Breath trailed off. "No thank you, Mel." He turned his head, so fragile now I thought it might snap off his neck. His dark eyes faded, but still piercing in the light. "That series I've been working on—my requiem, like Mozart, my ways of seeing death series?"

"Yes, pop. I've read them all as they appear."

"My agent called. He got a nibble from Knopf for the collected stories, Mel. From Knopf."

From Knopf. While I'm in Clockwatch, Antioch. "That's great, pop, great. No one says you won't get over this, a chance to see them, black and white."

"Don't kid a kidder, Mel," he whispered, shards of sound soughing through his teeth. "Curtains. Finished. *If* they publish them it will have to be posthumously."

"We're all the same, pop. Scribblers. We never give a damn, live or die, as long as our words, the marvel of our words, our egos, are spread upon their bright, disseminated page."

"That's it. That's it. Printed somewhere anyway. You make a mark. That's it." He moved his head, the pillow barely stirring, so weightless was he now. "The reason, Mel, the reason that I wanted you alone—I have this thing, this thing I have to say to you. I've carried it for what? Too many years. My hands are less than clean."

I saw it coming. I didn't need that shit. "It's OK, pop. OK. Whose hands are clean? You want me to forgive you, pop? For what? For something you can't identify, understand? That kind of forgiveness is easy, pop. You get that from the Pope. You've got to know the name of it, your sin, so it can have some meaning, gravity. Establish it. Dig roots. Let it flower up so you can study it. Your sin."

He gestured with his bony fingers and I took them in mine as though they were straws. "You hate me," he whispered. "Dying here, you're fighting me. I was a father for you, Mel. You're fighting me."

"You're the one, pop. Always you. It's you who's fighting me."

Transcriptions of Daylight

Through space and sky, between cloud, building and tree,
the light falls, gathers in the distances
each elemental arc of gravity,
the dark rotations, such equivalencies
as adorn wave and particle, present the eye
with tendril, filigree and arabesque,
such differences of gesture or reply
as weigh the water of all picturesque
landscapes, the memories and thoughts, like nets,
scattered across every terrain to catch
its meaning—leaves shaded with time, sunsets
distilling dreams from the day's small disclosures:
birds circling rows of trees, a struck match,
your hand taking mine, and between our fingers,
a darkness which our intimacy measures,
while around us daylight slows and lingers.

—Michael Young
New York, New York

He squeezed his eyes, maybe fearful he'd seem weak, they might mist up. He opened them. "So there it is," he breathed. "God help us. The ways we are." His fingers stirred and took my thumb. "You won't deny me this. I won't permit it, Mel. Too long I've never told a soul, not even Ruth. It is my will to tell you now."

"That's OK, pop. That's OK. A despot to the end."

His lips pulled back a little as he tried his wolf grin. "So there it is." He blinked his eyes. When he opened them he seemed ready—to stay and hash it out? To leave? "You remember, Mel—how many years ago—the telephone, I came with Simon, hammering on the door?"

"Indeed I do. Indeed I do."

He nodded his head gently as a leaf attached by just a vein, waiting to float off. His words were shaped by wind expelled, which yet would carry him away. "My ritual the same

each day. Run a business. Write a book. We *need* a ritual, the form. Good discipline. Every morning seven o'clock I'm at my desk, my Wall Street Journal and my Times, one buttered bagel, coffee black.

"Always Wall Street Journal first and then the Times. Thirty years ago—still fresh. Page 6. A picture—did I know it instantly? A couple sprawled across a bed. The caption: Sandra Levy, Jose Blanco, overdosed. Six kees of heroin under the mat, beneath two slats.

"I clipped it out, Mel, clipped it out. Sitting there by itself, my blotter empty, only it. I let it stare at me, her face. Had you seen it? Not the point. It was then I called you, Mel, not to ask how you are, how bout some lunch? I called you, Mel, to rub your nose in it, you understand? To rub your nose in it."

Earl M. Coleman lives
in Montville, New Jersey.



Heritage

The Ransom Note

He kidnapped himself,
stuffed a handkerchief in his mouth,
tied himself to a chair,
and typed the ransom note with his toe:
*If you want him back
it's going to cost you!*

The sun banged down.
A pigeon sauntered in
and pecked at his ankle.
The sun zoomed up.
He typed another note:
*We're torturing him—
you'd better come through!*

The phone rang.
"Let him go, you monster!"
they pleaded.

He just laughed.

Now he had them where he wanted them.

—Michael Corrigan
Bridgton, Maine

At the cloudless ivory mountain
where Grandfather & the Makahs
once lived

I sat upon a winding dirt path

The woven sunset, an ancientness
that surrounded me as it did him
& his grandfather

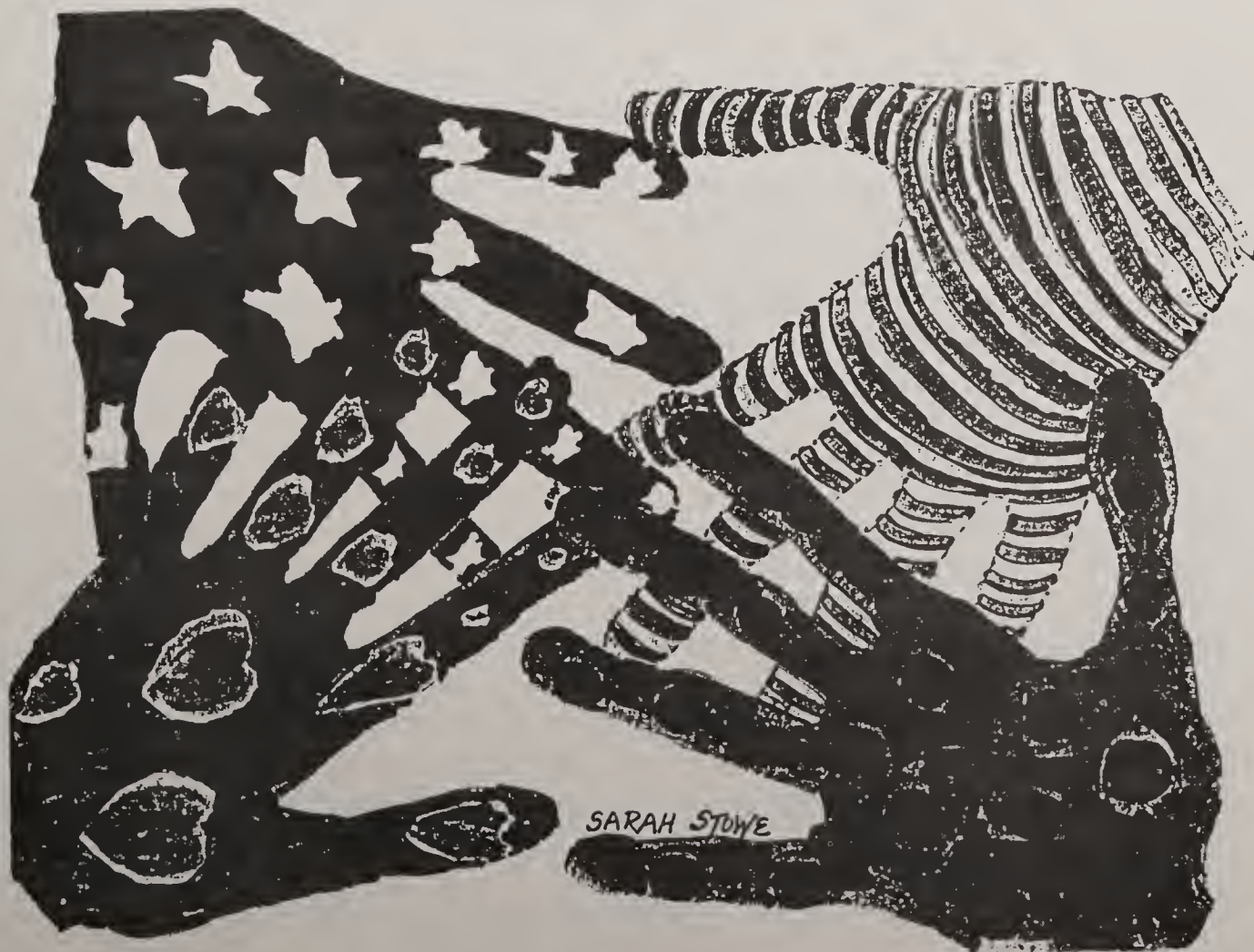
The evening grew old until nothing moved
& I could hear the spirits
their thoughts rang softly
on the quiet night air

they said

forever in beauty
forever unalone
forever now

I listen to your words, Grandfather
Your memory is clear & strong

—Maya Quintero
Tallahassee, Florida



Sarah Stowe, Grade 6
University Elementary
Bloomington, Indiana

*Collage by Cheyenne McGlaun, Grade 6
University Elementary, Bloomington, Indiana*



A Kind Act

My parents' house was built on an oversized lot with an expansive front yard maintained for years by a professional gardener. The back yard was strictly my father's domain, large, deep and weedy, but chaotically lush with his labor of love. Scattered for the indulgence of all five senses were several orange and other citrus trees, sundry flowers and rosebushes, rambling Concord grape and boysenberry vines and a night-blooming jasmine outside the bedroom window of my girlhood. Stretched along the southern border was a strawberry patch planted, believed by my little daughters, just for them. Their biggest claim to fame was a brick "oven" built by my father for mud pies and other little girl delicacies.

Way out back behind the large garage was a secluded, often shaded place, where a couple of peach trees, a maverick walnut tree and a dense cluster of banana trees grew. From a strong branch of this walnut tree, my father had hung an old hemp rope swing for my girls. The hemp was thick as a child's wrist and dark with age. It had hung from an apple tree in Jersey during my young childhood.

It was to this secluded sanctuary, a place where I most felt my dead father's presence, that I fled and at last allowed myself to cry. Sobbing as I turned in slow, twisting circles in an old hemp swing, I gradually felt my cousin's arms around me. "Don't feel lost," she softly said. "Your father's finest qualities are also in you. He will always be with you."

— *Prose poem by
Nancy Ganguli
Terre Haute, Indiana*



*Collage by Sarah Scott, Grade 6
University Elementary, Bloomington, Indiana*

Inheritance

Libero, whose reflection wavers, shakes, in transience,
his diaphanous eyes cast glare of fallen sun, cold light twilight descent—inconsolable in evening's
desperation.

Libero, who wears across his brow the ever-growing penumbra of shadow as cerebral day ebbs
into endless night—where faint rustling and echoing voices linger on the periphery of
thought.

Who holds my hand and squeezes.

Who sits in arm-chair disintegration almost motionless, jaw agape, watching the sun penetrate
the corona of horizon in the West.

He is the father of my father, lip that kissed the lip that kissed my cheek in infant hour.

He is the inheritor, as I, of living death, hopelessly lost in a forest of silent oblivion.

He is the man of mere twenty-five years I see in my heart of dreams, beckoning me into his arms
in magnificent fields of gold, blowing in lush waves, a halo of fertile youth crowning his
head.

I linger there in afterthought, the memory is sustenance I eat with trembling hands.

—Prose poem by
Nicholas Baldoni
Mishawaka, Indiana



Photo courtesy of Skylark

All in the Knowing

The persimmon tree
blossomed
lush and early,
if the fruit fill out
before the first frost
then winter should be
cold and full snowed;

faded orange
and bursting,
the plump fruit
now hang heavy
on the branches,
and the restive crows
soar cawing

above the still green oaks,
should winter come
cold and full snowed,
then persimmons
and the crows
with winged spirits
of the wind

do understand
much that humans
do not know.

—J. Macekura
Arlington, Virginia

Something

subtle facets

in the lean of afternoon
sees falling leaves beside
the drowsy meadow, circles
wild flowers brown and bowed,
drops like frost. Something

in the down of early snow
sweeps the dark and distant pines,
gathers on weary stone fences
silent and sable,
settles like fog. Something

in the soul of it all
lowers the shades of the world—
blankets endings and
beginnings both,
sleeps in ivory images.

—Rich Mitchell
Wellsville, New York

He was vivid
personality clear and brilliantly faceted
to pure, so pure, so unadulterated
naïve and unassuming

We are different:

Our personalities vacillate
in and out of focus
so even we are unsure of ourselves

Subtleties are our link of rapport
super awareness a blessing and curse:
seeing the subtle facets of others
we are shaped by them.

Oh to be blind . . .

—Morgan Ames
Salt Lake City, Utah

Mind Games

When children play too quietly
beware what moves their subtle minds.
Sweet smiles belie duplicity
when children play too quietly.
What dark thoughts lurk maliciously?
Watch closely now for danger signs.
When children play too quietly
beware what moves their subtle minds.

—B. E. Balog
Gary, Indiana

Sliding Down Devil's Hill in Early March

What do you hear when the wind stops blowing?
 Can you hear crows laughing?
 Do you hear ice tinkle and crack?
 Listen deeper.
 You can hear water
 running sweetly underground.
 You can hear the branches quiver,
 buds soften, burst green as fire.
 Listen hard now.
 That deep blue sound the sky makes
 is full of trumpets. Do you hear
 a big band playing swing?
 The forest is full of dancers
 jitterbugging, doing the fox trot,
 the merengue, the rhumba.
 Does your Flexible Flyer
 glide over the dance floor
 in the long bumpy slide
 into spring?

—Susan Thomas
 Marshfield, Vermont

Earth

Ungodly ways win wars here.
 God does not walk here—
 we try to walk like God here.

—Stephanie Dean
 Oakland, California

The beat of this drum,
 The pulse of this whistle,
 The striking of this bell,
 The cry of my spirit,
 Silence for words;
 A call from far away,
 Close as a name whispered,
 Enclosing me like the hand
 That grasps this stick,
 Beating this drum again—
 Following the echo.

—A. Josef Greig
 Berrien Springs, Michigan

Needing the Other

We know our biology
 demands diversity for the sake
 of species survival
 and it is true in culture, too
 that we need The Other,
 the culturally different,
 a pluralism of perspectives
 of philosophies
 is a stronger social DNA
 than is one ideology
 handcuffed to one god
 defined by one dictionary
 written by one religion.

—Rod Farmer
 Farmington, Maine



Photo by David Malish



Some Ancient Morning

you will awake to find that all is gone
only the voices will remain, a reminder

of where the sun shone, where
you used to look out the window

of where the huge melon of sun shone
into the bowl of your tired skull

washing over the days and nights.

—Larry Sawyer
Fairborn, Ohio



untitled letter: inflorescence

at the edge of the freeway
an engine burned

and blew over everyone
in a gust, a hum

as the smell of the rails.

they were building the road again

late and bright
the lake clouded with algae

where houses, hills

had come to the ground

on something-something street
in the shade of veinous leaves, of thin trees

and an atmospheric
daytime.

the sky had blown itself out

against the dark and wet grass

of kitchens and hallway,

a study of light

in unaccompanied spaces.

—Jennifer Brown
San Francisco, California

Celtic Warrior

If I'm slain, if I'm not to be
on earth or in your arms any more,
if the light is never to be in my eyes
or the darkness on my hips. . .
then I shall come gently
to this new way to absorb
all your winters into the fires
of my soul.

Where will I end?
Where is there a final place
for me to bury my mind?
Perhaps there are no arms
loving enough to embrace
the sadness of my thoughts.

But then . . . if I am not slain at all,
if I come through only bloodied
but sane, then I shall come to you
as a brute, not a girl; I shall take you
roughly and we shall both
continue and continue
the great noise of us
as we herald our lives.

—Ward Kelley
Greencastle, Indiana

Poet's note:

*The Roman historian, Ammianus
Marcellinus, wrote that Celtic women
followed their men into battle, taking an
energetic part in the melee.*



THE BOYFRIEND

by John Michael Cummings

Rox, tired of being a blond, was changing her hair color again. She wanted a dark subdued look for winter; brown—though not quite her natural chocolate color—in this season somehow complemented her face. A medium brown-brown, without red, she had decided. Or had her dark draping roots, growing measurably everyday and streaking from her scalp like the back of a skunk,

shock hang free. Whatever arrangement she tussled, the dark insistent roots still glared; they, these strains colored a natural oily brown, inched into the fluffy blond body of her head as if upon her crown a chocolate egg had been smashed, the melted syrup inside running downward into the points of a hysterical deformed star. She looked goofy, she admitted. She was changing her color again.



taking the risk; he wanted her, whatever she had to do, to stay somewhat blond, not to over-darken her hair, not to look again as she had before they dated, when she had lived with her parents and he with Kimmie, a natural blond. Wanting Rox to stay blond, he had downplayed the extent of her dark roots, saying they looked normal even though they had spread, to him, like a disease. "They're not that bad." But they were. Her hair had been colored six months earlier, and although hers grew slowly, now, under the yellow lengths, a swarthy mesh of dark roots flourished. Her natural color, even as he deceived himself into believing otherwise, was returning. During the week, he helped with the headband, with the barrette, with the lace ponytail band, and when they went to the drugstore, with the home hair-coloring kit. "What about this one," he insisted, taking from the shelf a box with a wheat-blond woman on the front. Rox, knowing his craving for blond hair, had decided on a champagne-blond treatment only because her natural dark color, the box said, would counteract the chemical coloring to create a blondish-brown. "I like you that color," Victor had agreed, not reading the box.

Yet he knew from other girls the brand often burned skin, so if she hurt herself, somehow his influence would surface. "Get all the roots," he advised, watching intently from the door. "But keep it off your skin, remember?" He drew his right hand to his mouth and bit a nail, eating himself, as it were, his sweaty lips crimped on a fingertip, his teeth snapping and clicking. He grew further anxious as he let his hand fall to his side and munched the sliver of removed cuticle. He spit the remains through a thinly puckered opening between his lips, the moist loaded tip of his tongue appearing for a vulgar second. He proved compulsive. With the index finger of the same hand, he began picking the side of the neighboring thumb, a habit of his accounting for the gnawed flaky skin whose dry white residue around the gouged rims of his fingernails looked like corroded seams of metal. The chloride smell

merely forced her into another coloring? For her hair in places indeed looked like that of a wild animal. Or that of a punk rocker. Her boyfriend, Victor, wondered which reason, heard over and over during the week, had finally convinced her to go brown. He, her important Italian man, pacing near the bathroom door (like a family man outside a delivery room, Rox had laughed), suddenly found himself remembering her complaints with her hair—the warning signs he had overlooked. All week she had grieved, one day using a cloth headband, the next a glittering barrette, another day letting the dyed

When the boyfriend peeked into the bathroom, he saw Rox wearing clear plastic gloves and mixing with the insulated fingertips of one hand a muddy grey solution shot from a squirt bottle held in the other hand. A pungent chemical smell, reminding him of battery acid, startled him, and as Rox squirted short dark streams to where the fingers of her other hand, rubbing in tight circles and advancing, patiently trekked across the tangled mess on her head, he quietly worried of this serious toxic odor.

But he worried not because she might burn her scalp, but because he influenced her into

as he watched annoyed him, like his embarrassing fat younger sister who, whether asked, accompanied his young-looking, trim parents, ruining their image. He kept staring, calmed by Rox's apparent comfort. "You getting the roots okay?" he called, adding "looks too dark," when she, whose darling uniform face usually held an expression of ready, queenish sass, turned to him in apologetic caution.

Honey, you can't tell until it's dry." She returned to squirting and rubbing, saturating the roots. "Why," she retorted suddenly, her arms chugging mechanically, "doesn't it look like I'm getting them?" She kept her head turned to the mirror, waiting for him to offer a submitting remark.

But he was nervous, fearing disaster: Rox herself, not her beautician friend, was coloring her hair this time—the first time ever, a client using one of those "unpredictable store-bought methods," Rox had earlier mimicked her disapproving friend. Victor knew his looks made her friend Marsha jealous; he liked bringing a stir about a man between them. He started pacing again. "Do you feel anything?" He peeked into the bathroom again. "Rox, it looks too dark." Her dark and nappy, soaked hair changed her appearance drastically; her face, while never perfect to him, now appeared larger, her cheeks lumpier, her nose angrier, her skin harsher, her ears springier.

Why! Why did she have to color her hair again! "Rox, it doesn't look blond at all!" A rich walnut brown diffused the greasy glisten of the solution, panicking him. "It's not working, Rox." His index finger, digging against the side of his thumb in the stabbing and flicking action of a backhoe, struck an inner layer of skin, the pink flesh tender. That she ignored him actually calmed him somewhat, but the more she scrubbed the roots, the more brown, not blond, showed. "Maybe it lightens up after a few minutes," he chimed, answering himself, in his brief breath of hope, carelessly picking his thumb again, the pain immediate and surprisingly extreme. "It must lighten up." But he doubted if what hung from her head as a viscid globby outgrowth would dry into a silky golden luster, his preference year-round. Ultimately, he faced a brunette girlfriend now, his first.

Needlessly, he tried to imagine how she would look when her hair had dried, and in his mind as he extracted the wetness, he saw a dark helmet of contrast, her pale skin draped with heavy gloomy waves. Walking away, across the fluffy caramel carpet, he wondered if he would adjust to her as a brunette, and in a whirl of thoughts he saw, as if looking into a dream, his friends as they reacted to her new look—some faces amazed and pleased, others leery, in disbelief. She had ruined herself. Her being a blond had given her, well, him. Across the room the cascading sound of running water ceased—overlapped and drowned by the

praise her glossy yellow hair earned him—months of daily conquests for his being with a blond—lofted his memory of her to a height of both worship and regret. Why did he leave her? As a blond, she had been for him universally rewarding. With the toe of his sneaker, he scuffed the carpet, but the ugly brown tuft, plowed in the opposite direction of the light, only darkened. For heavy subconscious minutes, he pictured Kimmie grinning at him—at his mistake.

When he realized the blow-dryer had stopped, he was considering calling her, and as he let the darker brown impression of his shoe remain on the carpet, he remembered a friend of hers who knew her new number. Silence in the apartment and a creak on the threshold of the room distracted him. Rox



Illustration by Steve Cartwright

racing whine of her compact hair dryer. She neared finishing; whether he indeed would share dear social time and space with a brunette he would learn in mere minutes. Why! Again, with his fidgety fingernail, he gouged the tender skin. But his other pain, of enduring her likely new hair color, drowned, as the dryer had quieted the spigot, the sting. He thought of peeking into the bathroom, to see in which direction, either lightening or darkening, the evaporation went, but he knew—he knew she had lost, intentionally, what made her so worthwhile.

He never loved her, he admitted, the whirl of brown underfoot from his pacing nauseating him. Kimmie, he loved; the automatic

stood in the doorway, grinning, her skin pale and blotchy without makeup. Her hair was darker, flatter, somehow shorter—but mostly blond. Yes! He could still love her!

John Michael Cummings lives in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia.



Haiku

Blooming cactus calls
to distant desert mirage
skeleton picked clean

—Shirley Jo Moritz
Merrillville, Indiana

The Color of Milk

for lionetti

I am standing in this hospital room
waiting for you to make your entrance
into my world: at 4:29 AM your tiny,
placenta-filled body slides
comfortably out of its nesting place
and into a stranger's hands.
You will cry this first time
to show signs of life, but it will not be
the last time your delicate tears
fall on ground undisturbed.
Years from now your face will show
the traces of its weeping seasons.
But for now I stand over you,
like a watchman protecting a prized
possession, like a soldier guarding
a king's fortress; staring at you intently
like a sculptor observing his new creation.
I'm standing here in this room
and your face stares at me:
eyes the color of summer evenings
filled with moonlight stories;
the mouth small and simple
but perhaps through it the lyrics
of poetry will one day flow.
Color leche. The color of milk.
That is what they would say if you
had been born in my native country.
I know this moment comes only once:
I want to hold you, kiss you,
squeeze you tightly in my arms,
warm my face with your face,
and never again let you go.

—liony batista
Miami, Florida



Diet Wise

Scrimp the fat high flying dish
then side step egg rolls of
flesh. Watch for stop au-gratin gravy
stuffed in the goose's neck you
butterball. Go poached dry broil
dressed in tomato sauce. Toss out
take-out bacon bits teriyakied nuts to
you!

—Anna DeMay
Orange Park, Florida

Checkout

When you come right down to it,
there are two ways to go. Right,
with its candy wrappers hiding dark
sweetness. Or left, where a woman
is adding the price of my own human needs.
She doesn't look as I flip through a tabloid to
one of those stories the big papers missed,
where Martians have Elvis, who probably
never stood in line and watched
a milk carton fill an electric eye,
never reached down to the soul
of his own dark pocket wishing
up the change this woman will ask for.
No, everyone's waiting and canned ravioli,
cakes of pink soap start staring out
like pictures of all the people anyone
would rather be, "The Sexiest Man" or
"This Year's Best." She fits my evidence
of hungers into double-bagged squares, turns back,
faces the magazines she's seldom seen anyone buy.

—Francine Witte
New York, New York

Waiting

The clock struggled to round
the corner
minutes tumbling in disarray
clutching her shallow breath
sitting in the restaurant
waiters stared
waiters waiting
he hadn't come
eating stones from a cold plate
night fled like a bat in the woods
on his way
up or down the street
here to there
he came with contrived smiles
selling sweet touches
grains of innocence
what could she do?
in this harsh and lonely world
lies are currency
pumping air into flimsy dreams
inflating hopeless notions
to endure the ordeals of waiting.

—Gerald Zipper
New York, New York



*Illustrations
this page by
Stacy Graan-Wilson*

Photo by David Malish



Calling the Names

A banner hangs in the chancel of Lafayette Park Methodist Church. Royal purple with a loop of red satin ribbon, it reads: *I am as long as someone calls my name.*

I want to take it down, fold it in upon itself
and worship the God of the living.
I know the God of the dead.
But today, the day of all saints

and all sinners, we ritualize remembering
by calling the names: *Marcus, John, Stanley,*
Erwin, Stuart, Clay. I know the names.
Marcus. John—received his results

over the phone, ran crying into the yard
and alone cradled his black lab. *Stanley.*
Erwin—told Stan that he had to hold on
through Christmas, but Stanley died

on Christmas Day. I know the names.
Stuart—turned to my father and confessed,
If I could take back fifteen minutes of my life,
I know which fifteen minutes it would be.

Clay. A bell sounds for each. I know
the names: *Marcus, John, Stanley, Erwin,*
Stuart, Clay. My God, have mercy,

I know the names.

—Jon Marshall
St. Louis, Missouri

Like Opening a Woman's Purse

You play it with skin-battered pouches,
sweat dark and filled with pathos
trailing the mold and crumbs of lost-and-found,
held up as a slightly singed victory sign,
or sometimes waved as a lament of speech
in faded feminine verse, "I was found and now I am lost."
Instruction is generally given in kangaroo,
an inside-out language of slow gestation.
A purse always breathes with the bits of loose changing
felt unseen deep inside our fingertips,
husbanded riches, a claim ticket smudged
with a perfumed slash of crayon-red lipstick
across the winning combination.
Sometimes everything made up comes undone.
And the game must start from scratches and scraps,
again, the way it always has, with women making do
and men wondering what the object of the game is.
Then we secretly smile, it's like opening a woman's purse,
we say, or like masons making silent,
heretic greetings: we cap the lid
on our jar of golden fireflies,
but leave plenty of air holes just in case.

—Noël Valis
New Haven, Connecticut



A TIME TO DIE

by Verne R. Sanford

I attended her funeral, and I cried. Daylight is precious in January, near this Great Lake. Thick gray clouds thought of descending to enshroud the bell tower, were it not for silent breaths of northwest wind. Four heavy, black bells hung motionless.

It was gloomy inside as well. Some light managed to filter in through stained-glass. Three plump yellow candles sat heavily atop tall wooden candlesticks near the altar, their islands of bright flames unwavering. There was no smoke, no odor. Men and women all in black sat quietly, waiting. A few ladies wore hats.

I welcomed soft music as pleasant background for my thoughts, *Now Rest Beneath Night's Shadow, Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*. How many times had I listened intently to Bach's beautiful strains? Now they were merely background. The oboe was melancholy, the violin undaunted.

This was her time to die, but still I cried. She had lain, quite motionless, for years, her white-draped, nursing-home bed a sideless, lidless coffin. Now and then, when Walter had somehow erred while feeding her, she exclaimed, rather emphatically, "Walter!" He was always there at lunchtime. He appreciated these impulsive blurts of his name. Sarah said nothing else. Many years ago, I saw both of them frequently, weekly, before the 8:00 a.m. Sunday services. As I think of it now, I became better-acquainted with Walt. Writing and woodworking always came up in our conversations; he was the writer, I the woodworker. Somehow, we always spoke of both hobbies. Sarah and Walt were both well-read. Sarah was friendly and outgoing, and freely discussed many subjects, I dare say, even writing and woodworking!

Her disease progressed rapidly, her muscles weakened. She began holding Walter's arm, shuffling some as she walked. Her pleasant smile and bright eyes faded into drawn facial features and a blank stare. Her speech slurred, then ceased altogether. One Sunday morning Walter came alone. Sarah

could no longer walk.

I almost smiled when the unison of the children's choir broke my thoughts with the beautiful melody of *Panis Angelicus*. I had always liked it better than Bach's *Jesu*, *All stand and face south* were the blunt instructions printed in the Service of Christian Burial. Two women and four men attended the red, almost-black coffin. Family members stood behind. Walt looked very tired. He squinted as his grandson and granddaughter, together, draped a white pall over the coffin. It appeared to be solid-white or off-white, with no decoration. During his homily, Pastor Graves described the pall as having been woven from virgin lambs' wool, and signifying Sarah's fulfillment of her baptism.

They all stood, motionless, beneath the brick archway separating narthex from nave. It seemed awkward, even a little impolite, to be staring. I was relieved when we sang *Entrance Psalm 23*. Some of us could not see the words, others used handkerchiefs when the singing was loudest. *The procession moves to the baptismal font*. Reddish candlelight reflected in the coffin. It was placed with its foot-end pointing at the font, as though the dead, after baptism, had simply lain down. The coffin would not be opened again.

I pictured her lying inside, lying as still as she did in life. I wiped my eyes. I had never verbally expressed love for these friends, but I did feel this love, and ever so strongly now. I could not reconcile my feelings. My friend, Sarah, was dead, and it was *good* that she was dead. Sadness and gladness do not somehow average themselves into a middle-feeling.

The second reading was louder and clear, "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you...For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities..., shall be able to separate us from the love of God,"

My eyes wandered to a flickering candle. With effort I could smell a faint sweetness. "Honey," I thought. "It smells a bit like honey." A small drop of wax shrunk as it trailed down the side of the candle, as a tear wets a cheek and disappears.

The congregation knelt (my knees would not allow it) for Creed and Prayers, then sat again. The Pastor moved to the side of the coffin and read the words of the Commendation of the Dead. They are beautiful words, seldom-heard words: "Into your hands, O merciful Savior, we commend your servant, Sarah. Acknowledge, we humbly beseech you, a sheep of your own fold, a lamb of your own flock, a sinner of your own redeeming. Receive her into the arms of your mercy, into the blessed rest of everlasting peace, and into the glorious company of the saints in light. Amen."

We sang, more enthusiastically, as the Pastor preceded the coffin and family members out of the Church, "In thee is glad-ness, a-mid all sad-ness,...." Crying was finished now. Even the oboe had lost its mournfulness. I thought of Walt; his crying was not finished. As I left the church, some words of an old spiritual came into my mind,

*Now don' you be weepin' for this
pretty bit o' clay,
For the little girl who live here,
she done gone an' run away,
She's doin' mighty-finely,
an' she 'preciates your love,
But the good Lord wan' her
in that large house up above*

A lone black bell tolled, slowly.

Verne R. Sanford lives
in Valparaiso, Indiana.



Blackberries

The elves that make blackberries
work in a factory under a cliff
just over the border in Canada.

The needles whirl beneath
their woodland voices
as they stitch each ball to stem,

inject rare nectar from the cellar,
add scent, dark polish,
and step back to admire.

On a cloudy night the Elf-Mother
sprinkles a basketful down by the river
and through the woods.

—*Scott Moncrieff*
Berrien Springs, Michigan

Cucumber Eyes

She sliced them after midnight, dewy and thin,
to place over eyes fierce from crying;
green coin for the ferry-man, the dream-splicer,
to carry her through the vehement nights,
the long aching days
of thirteen.

Remedy out of *Teen*, she pressed crisp vegetables
over red lids
to draw away pain, or the evidence of pain,
so that she could sleep
with a lesser guilt
of growing.

It is seldom beautiful to change.

They withered like rejected skin
under the bed all morning
until her mother found them
in this mood of a room.
How to love this thing half vegetable
who was her little girl?

She smoothed the sheets, gathered used Kleenex,
and wondered at the length of birth;
all the midwife never told
of cures as blind and cruel
as cucumbers.

—*Joanne Clarkson*
Aberdeen, Washington

In the Mall

for Hadley

A reindeer's mechanical rack
bobs at the bulging pack
on the back of the wooden armchair
where Santa Claus reigns in the glare
of lights: white beard, red nose, bent ear.
One little girl wants none of his cheer.
She has her eye on the merry-go-round,
its ring of horses curling their necks to the sound
of brassy notes. Her mother buys two passes
and the horses rise. The child holds the pole, tosses
her head. Her nostrils flare,
and she's fast away from that man in the chair.

—*Joyce Brown*
Baltimore, Maryland



New York Winters

I saw her again the other day sitting outside the Gap.
She was here last winter, wearing only a black plastic bag.

It was ripped, exposing her swollen belly.
Matted hair, cracked up, she had lived to another winter.

Was the baby taken before entering this life?
Or is he now fighting addiction and the system?

Later, only crack will numb his rage.
The skaters and the shoppers are unaware.

I want to join them but I can't.

—*Emily Florence*
W. Valley City, Utah

Western Mortuary

The dead
Live in a grave
A flower . . . some grass . . . big stone
A home for the spirit . . . one life
I sleep.

—Candice Allen
Portage, Indiana



An Evening in High Desert

Hum along with the monotonal breeze while bird wings
beat like Indian drums in the blue space just above
your cluttered head. Then let the flood of silence
rush in one ear and out the other, taking all debris. What remains
might surprise you: a lizard close as your all-time favorite dog,
sun-ripened shrubs the color of your mother's peach custard pie,
the steady eyes of an antelope stag so much like your father's. . .
and the earthy scent of a lover who once wore your ring. Perhaps
you will see a miniature boulder no bigger than the basketball
your stepson now takes to bed in some distant house
or a sturdy young pinion pine as green and wild
as the eyes of the daughter whom you strain to embrace
in cute letters with eye-catching cartoons
and in phone calls that remind you of the ticking clock. Regrets
cling to your lofty rock like lichens: do not attempt
to scrape them off. But your sister is here, in the disc
of dark chocolate that would further brighten her radiant face
and even your brother the stranger, in the faint stars
he often sails by when clouds roll in. Do not be alarmed
by near coyotes howling with far sirens. You will return
with your flesh and soul intact.

—Richard Vance
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Ida Discusses the Robbery

She talks wedding
but means empty nest.
Her words knit white gowns
from proud air
at the same moment
as they unstitch them,
shred the beauty
into minute pieces
the wind can bear
to just about anywhere on this planet.
Her tongue splashes silver
but the eyes
are rental trucks
backed into a distant driveway.
Three daughters
and each one
ransacking the family home,
stripping the foundations,
its planks
sagging with silence,
propped up uselessly by memory.
She beams the process
into our willing ears
in a work cafeteria,
her tears crystallizing into details,
the band, the flowers,
the reception hall.
She talks of inviting the thief in
with pomp and chicken,
hugs and wedding music,
celebrating the robbery
in a stylish green dress,
low-cut, elegant,
first new thing she's bought for herself
in years.

—John Grey
Providence, Rhode Island



Haiku

The Meeting: London

Meeting you
in England
after a ten-year silence,
there is the same unanswered question
regarding my loyalty;
a deep,
personal wound.

Perhaps our accidental meeting
in a crowded London pub
is more than coincidence.

Our words of greeting
are scarce;
uneasy.

Your angry question
still lingers
between us,
is an immediate concern
within a mood
of laughter,
smoke
and ale.

—William Beyer
Belvidere, Illinois

Fruit pie aroma
floats up from the window sill
flies buzz apple peels

—Shirley Jo Moritz
Merrillville, Indiana

Margie's Hello

"Hey
Ju
dy,
How
you
do
in?"

This was always
for all she knew
Margie's greeting
spoken in her
husky yet soft
southern comfort blend
of licorice and lemon.

Each syllable rolled
over her tongue with
separate yet equal delight
letting you know each
part of you was viewed
with true regard.

Although Margie's gone
her spirit still
whispers her song
gently blowing away
my blue sorrows.

Listening, I scan
the clearing skies,
nod, smile, and echo back:

"Hey
Mar
gie,
How
you
do
in?"

Rondel: I Tend My Garden

I tend my garden faithfully—
carnations, lilies, roses, thrift—
add compost, plant food, then I sift
the soil about each plant neatly.
With plants, as thoughts, it's clear to me
that gardening is a double gift.
I tend my garden faithfully,
carnations, lilies, roses, thrift.

My memories recall a spree
of color, fragrance like a drift
of warm spring breeze. Spirits uplift.
I ponder and give thanks to Thee:
I tend my garden faithfully.

—B. E. Balog
Gary, Indiana



Dale Ferguson

—Judith Birch
Merrillville, Indiana



THE HAPPIEST GUY I KNOW

by Jan Johnson

I hesitated before picking up the ringing phone on my nightstand. No one calls with happy news at 2:17 a.m. on a Sunday morning, except I guess Kurt Stuvénal, with whom I went to law school.

Kurt is an amiable man, given to assuming responsibility and carrying through on it. That is to say, he's a man of duty. And I've always respected that because I'm one myself.

"Guess where I've been tonight," Kurt demanded.

"You in trouble?" My voice sounded like a croak, blurry with sleep.

"No! I've got unbelievable news. You sitting down?"

In accordance with his wishes, I sat up, abandoning the warm spot that stretched from pillow to bedpost and planted bare feet on chilly floorboards. He sounded drunk, and that demanded additional lucidity from me. Always a slow riser, I thought I might shake awake faster if I were cold.

"I am sitting. Where are you?"

"Rapid City, South Dakota."

"Good God, why?"

"I've just come from Angus's bachelor party."

The explosion of shock left me speechless, until I recognized it for the practical joke it had to be. Angus MacCumber would never marry.

The last time I saw Angus was Kurt's wedding, when Kurt got himself hitched to a shrewish, thick-set Norwegian from Hibbing, Minnesota. I flew in from the West Coast because I was a groomsman and split the cost of a motel room with Angus, who drove seven hours to be there and he wasn't even in the wedding party.

Angus drove across the great semi-arid plain all the way from Scenic, South Dakota, a place completely unfit for its name. It's located near the Badlands National Park, which does live up to its name. Not even on I-90. Just one of those dusty towns off the reservation. A rarely open gas station, a post office, a filthy bar. And Angus's office. He

was the town's only lawyer even though no law practice can survive without at least three lawyers in town—one for each side plus a judge.

"Angus," I had said at the time, "you can't practice law without others to represent each side of the conflict. And if you're gonna hang out a shingle in a small town, at least pick a good one. Aspen?"

"Nobody in Aspen would hire me as their lawyer." It was true.

Angus—all 6-foot-6 and 322 pounds of him—looked precisely like a baby. His face seemed to never require shaving. A shock of unruly red hair grew straight out of his head, giving off a Woody Woodpeckerish effect. Not handsome. Not handsome at all.

Even his addictions worked against any type of tough-guy image. He drank Shasta-brand grape soda pop compulsively and ate peanuts the way others smoke. Everywhere he went, he left a trail of empty purple cans and shattered shells. His breath smelled faintly of peanuts and he often wore a grape mustache.

But he had one almost magical quality. A childhood impulse turned him into a musician. While passing a pawn shop on the streets of downtown Huron as a boy of 10, he fell under the spell of a used ukulele and saved his allowance for two months to purchase it. He brought it along to law school and entertained us in the slower hours of our studies by playing and singing. His most requested hit was "The Bare Necessities" from Disney's *Jungle Book*. "What are my choices?" Angus would day. "How many composers write *Opus No. 2 for Violin and Ukulele*?" None. We were stuck with Hawaiian folk tunes and theme music from Disney movies. But he could really play that thing.

"Nah," I said into the phone. "Not Angus. He'll never marry."

Kurt's guttural voice grew sincere. "It's true. He's getting married on Valentine's Day."

"Who to?" I couldn't imagine the woman who would have him. Then I remembered

the trip Sheila and I made back to my old South Dakota stomping grounds. I wanted to show my girlfriend where I came from with the hope that she'd understand me. After the Black Hills, we took that long, flat detour on Highway 44 all the way to Scenic to visit Angus, who I felt a moral obligation to visit. Surely Angus was the loneliest man in America.

"I don't think so," Sheila had said as we pulled away from a waving Angus, his pink face sweating in the morning sun. The tires on our rented Nova crunched the equally pink gravel of his driveway. Every time I drive those quartz South Dakota roads I think of the Sioux way, the hard path, The Red Road. To be on The Red Road, you have to give up four things:

Attachment to all material possessions.

Friends.

Family.

Your personal identity.

Once you give that up, you're ready to go all alone toward your destiny. Or so they say. I myself don't adhere much to that kind of woo-woo thinking, but Angus is the type who does.

Anyway, I remember driving down that pink quartz highway, waving off Sheila's comment. The one about Angus being the happiest guy she knew. "No way! He's probably the only white man for 40 miles."

"So? Maybe he has a woman from Pine Ridge."



Sheila sipped on the grape drink Angus had given her for the road. She was born, raised and educated within walking distance of Puget Sound, so I excused her ignorance of the ways of the Sioux. She also did not know that we once drug him to a strip joint in Vermillion during law school and, judging by his enthusiastic reaction, I think it was the first time he'd ever seen a naked woman.

"He doesn't have a woman," I told Sheila.

"Still, I think he's the only happy person I



know.”

She lifted the purple concoction to her lips then offered me a swig, which I declined. Then she smiled at me with a purple-pop mustache. I remember each movement, each syllable distinctly because she was right. Angus was the only truly happy person I knew, too. Whatever his Red Road was, he was on it.

With some difficulty, a drunken Kurt finally explained that the lucky bride-to-be was Miss Carramae St. Michael of Clover, South Carolina. Population 3,451. “The little town with *love* in the middle.” Kurt delivered his message in an obnoxious Southern accent.

Apparently, they met via the Internet in a Jungian chat group, truly proving that computers are powerful machines.

I remained dubious. “Has anybody actually seen this woman?”

“Big hooters,” Kurt said. “Huge. After that, I’d say she’s a three.”

“So you’ve seen her?”

“Twice she’s been to visit.”

Kurt refrained from passing out long enough for me to elicit a few vital pieces of information. Angus was staying at the same hotel, probably in a room reserved under the name “Lyman Something-Or-Other.”

“He’s the elevator guy over in Kadoka,” Kurt explained.

Miraculously, the night clerk at the Alex Johnson Motel in Rapid City connected me with a room reserved under the name Lyman Rasmussen at 3 a.m. West Coast time, 4 a.m. Mountain time after I convinced him I desperately needed a very large order of fertilizer.

Angus answered.

“Thanks for inviting me to the bachelor party. Pal.”

He apologized, explaining that he didn’t want me to take it upon myself to buy a plane ticket just for his bachelor party. Then he confirmed it all. The Internet Carl Jung chat group. Clover. The hooters.

“She’s the most beautiful woman in the world. And smart, too. She’s learning to play the ukulele.”

“Where will you live?”

“Clover.”

“You sold your practice?”

“Who’d buy it?”

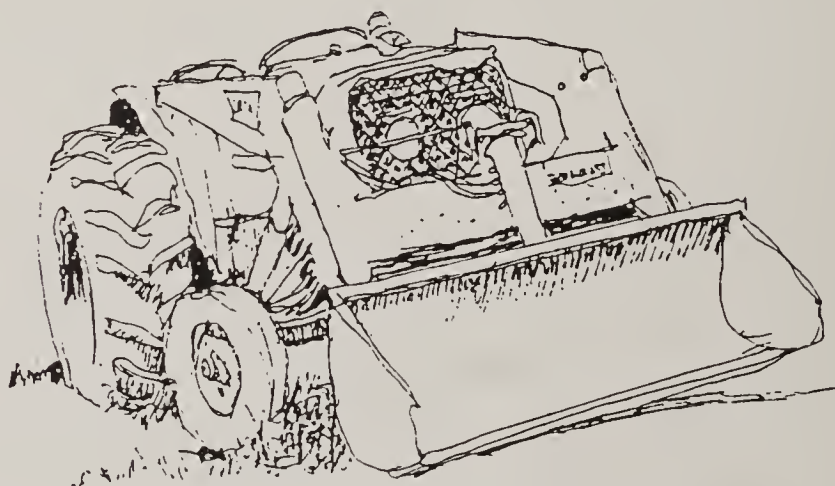
I shuddered to think of him having to pass a bar exam. He never had to; South Dakota allows its graduates to slip directly from the classroom to the courtroom without the extra

step of a test between. Small populations eliminate the need for such filters. Angus seemed to read my mind.

“I won’t practice law any more. I never liked it anyway.”

“Angus,” I said, “you need to think about this. It’s a big move for you. You may be giving up your career.”

“I love her, Mark. It’s joy and agony at once. I’d gladly give up anything... .”



Then he went on and on with some drivel about how he could see a million stars from the window of the Alex Johnson Motel. I looked out my bedroom window but all I saw was darkness. Cloudy skies in a big city full of lights obscure such sights. Anyway, he was drunk. Moonstruck. In love.

We said good-bye and I hung up feeling as twitchy as if I’d been drinking coffee all night. I couldn’t decide if I was anxious about his fate or giddy for his happiness. Fat raindrops splattered against the window. The rain was lighter than Seattle’s usual February monsoons but still sounded distant and moody. It’s not that I’m *afraid* of the dark or anything like that but I just prefer daylight.

Unable to fall back to sleep, I shivered into a pair of jeans and a sweater, then walked through the murky drizzle to a neighborhood eatery that opened early for breakfast. Over a steaming stack of pancakes and black coffee, I contemplated how Angus would ever earn a living in Clover, South Carolina.

He was unfit for anything, not just the practice of law. Kurt and I prodded and goaded him through law school. His grades

almost got him flunked out twice. But his uncle was the owner of millions of acres of prime farm land, two banks, a chain of newspapers and an NFL team. He was the richest alumnus of the school at a time when the board of regents was raising money for a new wing. The dean made allowances for Angus, but I don’t think it was because of Angus’s uncle. I think the dean liked Angus.

Angus didn’t threaten anyone, so people

liked him and that’s probably how he survived. I mean the guy had no direction. One spring, the law school gang drove over to Gavin’s Point Dam to sail the one-man sailboat Kurt’s dad gave him. Most of us sailed from point A to B to C. C to A to B. B to C to A. You know, going somewhere, in a triangle. Not Angus. he just drifted, happy with any shore. Direction came only from Kurt, me, the dean and now, apparently, Miss Carramae St. Michael of Clover, South Carolina.

Anyhow, it’s one of the Great Mysteries how anybody finds their life’s work. I left Rivalon & Morold when one of the deals I was working on turned into an offer to provide corporate counsel for a technology start up. Then I moved into the chief executive’s chair when that venture seemed like it would fly.

The note that Sheila left said that all I cared about was the title on my business card. What hurt most was that I’d just received new business cards that day.

* * *



The next time I talked to Angus he was calling from the Sioux Falls airport. He said it was 40 below zero when he left Scenic for good. All he took from that desolate winter desert was a single suitcase of clothes. In less than an hour, he would board a plane for the warm, moist bosom of the South.

I pictured Angus tossed through the sky, away from the stark, treeless prairie where he grew up. His whole life he could see the curvature of the earth just by looking at the horizon. Now he would live in a forest that would shield even the sky from his view. And he'd live in that forest with a woman.

I wondered what Sheila would have said about it all. Certainly, she would have suggested we buy them a wedding present. What is adequately expensive to give newlyweds? Wine glasses maybe?

* * *

The elevator jittered to a stop at "Housewares" in Nordstrom's. I fingered the sharp edges carved into the thick glass. This was big news and Sheila had liked Angus. He was the only happy person she knew. I clinked the goblet back on the beveled glass where I found it and asked the clerk where I might find a pay phone. She pointed to one slouching against the wall outside a room called "The Mother's Lounge," where women and their babies hid while breastfeeding.

I'd memorized Sheila's phone number not from dialing it, but by thinking about dialing it. Braced with this good reason to call, I dialed.

"Am I interrupting?"

"We're eating dinner."

"I have big news. Angus is getting married."

"Who's Angus?"

"Angus MacCumber. You met him at Kurt's wedding?" I waited in silence for her to respond. She didn't. "You've got to remember him from when we went to Scenic? South Dakota? Angus got you hooked on that purple pop you drink?"

"Oh yeah. I remember him."

"Surprising, huh? Angus getting married?"

"Mark, why are you calling me?"

* * *

Hard rain beat against the window glass on the dark Sunday afternoon when I next heard

from Kurt. It was May, but you'd never know it by the weather. I really needed some sun and I certainly had the air miles to use on a long weekend in Phoenix, but duty calls. I couldn't break away from the office. We were buying up a circuit board manufacturer and the deal was in shreds. The company had been in receivership back in '92 and Washington's bankruptcy laws, at that time, were complicating my deal. I was trying to explain this to Kurt when he interrupted me mid-sentence.

"Angus is separated."

"What happened?"

"She tried to stab him. He was in the bathtub. She walked in with a bread knife—raised. Luckily, she hesitated. Just in time, her mother stopped her."

"What was Angus's mother-in-law doing in the bathroom?"

"She lived with them."

"Geez. Living with your mother-in-law! So why did she want to stab him?"

"Why? Because she thought they had all this intellectual intimacy, a psychic connection. Then she realized she married a big slob of a man who sat on the sofa drinking Shasta grape pop while she carried laundry up from the basement. He wasn't virtual any more. They met."



"Don't tell me this. I can't take it. I'm too old for downer endings. You can stand them in college English classes, maybe even up until you're about 27. Then you want Disney to rewrite all the endings."

"Sorry. He's back in South Dakota. Working at a hog farm north of Colton. I guess his uncle owns it."

* * *

I don't know why but I wasn't shocked when the girl who answered the phone at the hog operation paused when I asked for Angus MacCumber. She told me that Angus didn't work there any more. He'd been killed.

Somehow, he fell into a pen of liver-colored shoats, mean from too much togetherness in too small a space. They devoured him.

Angus had worked in commercial pork production during the summers away from law school. He knew the ways of hogs. He'd watched them pick the weak one and eat the tail off. He'd seen a sow eat the smallest of her litter—her own young—to give the strong ones a better chance.

The window of my office overlooks another office tower and I stared across at the cathedral-like building while a dissonant ukulele tune played in my mind. I wanted the final chord to fulfill itself into harmony but it sat there, on the border between two sounds, unable to complete itself.

My eyes followed the tapering spires of the temple next door up, up to the sky. I blinked with hope of seeing those stars that Angus loved but the bright sunlight blinded me. The storm system had moved east overnight. But that really didn't matter.

The only way to see stars is to wait for the sun to go down.

*Jan Johnson lives
in Portland, Oregon.*

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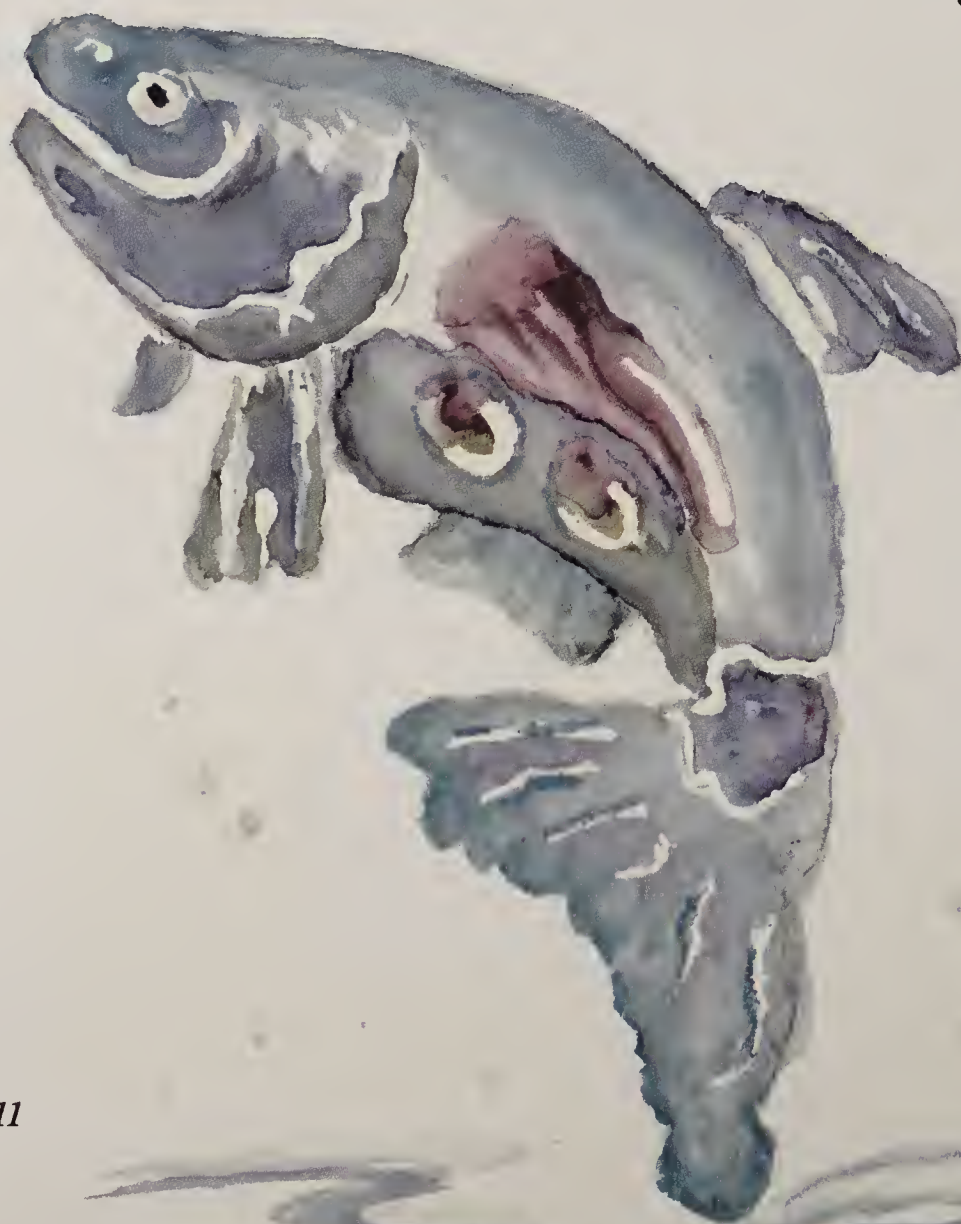
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The Times

The times are bad
but only some-times.
Some-times are short
but those times may be
as tall as giants. I wrote
some-times are bad not
too short a time ago—
but for all I know these
times are good.

—Odie Martez Gray, Age 11
Allentown, Pennsylvania



Marie Bunker

To One Who Has Gone

Pamela Hunter

I have weeded my garden
I have cleaned my house

Editor

I have washed the windows
I have ironed the clothes

I have scrubbed my floors
I have written the letters and paid the bills

Now I have time to write a poem
Now I have time to wait for you, until

I must weed the garden
I must clean the house

I must write the letters and pay the bills
I must organize closets and scrub floors

I must wash dishes and iron the clothes
I must dust the house and clean the kitchen

I must wash the windows
I must hang the drapes

Through long days I wait for you
I have the time to wait for you.

—Bonny Sanders
Jacksonville, Florida

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No Nettles

The path to the lake
in those summers
so long ago
had no nettles
only the promise
of splashes into the water
instantaneous baptisms
that left my blonde curls
so laboriously sculpted
by my mother
plastered against my grin
unholy and wild.

Afterwards the bath shack beckoned—
its dry planks
as gray
as my hair
as I tell this—
a perch on which to sit
and suck on pop and sweets
surrounded by tin signs
I didn't know
would later haunt
a diner for those
in search of their lost time.

Back at my grandparents' house
the place where many of the novels
I read take place—Jane Eyre
Dolores Claiborne
both lived here—
I looked forward
to dodging bats from the attic
at dusk
and lying
in bed listening
to big people
dancing at the club next door
dreaming of when
I would be
one of them.

—Linda McMillan
Valparaiso, Indiana

The Little Girls

The little girls at the pool
like the deep end, though
they can barely swim.
The lifeguard is tired
of telling them to stop—
besides, he's busy
with willowy Sylvia.
They flail with brown arms
(Gita's pudgy, Astasia's thin)
bounce on the surface
hold their nose duck under
wiggle up the ladder
to jump back in with funny forms—
"I'm a fork!"
"No, I'm a chair!"—
excited, on edge, bossy,
shivering to leap again.

—Tim Blackburn
Bridgewater, New Jersey



Illustration by Steve Cartwright



A CHILD'S GAME

by Joanne Zimmerman

Elizabeth sensed her mother's nervousness in the tight hold on her hand, that almost hurt. And the way she kept tucking her hair in under her hat as they walked. Any other time she would have protested holding hands, being eleven years old, but this time she shared the apprehension and was glad of the sweaty touch.

She wore a cotton dress, belted across the back, that was getting too short, and carried a small suitcase holding the new bathing suit—blue wool with a diagonal red stripe—that Dorothy had bought her the previous week. The suitcase bumped against her leg as she tried to accommodate her steps to her mother's gait in high heels.

Liz tried the bathing suit on in front of the mirror, stuffing her fists into it against her flat chest. "I ought to have a new dress, too."

"I'll buy you a new dress when school starts." To Liz, at the beginning of summer, this seemed as remote as being twenty.

Her father Graham said, "Don't you thank your mother for the bathing suit?"

"Yes. Thank you. But I ought to have a new dress, too." Liz pouted.

Dorothy said, "We don't have the money. Anyhow, nobody gets dressed up out there. You'll live in your shorts and bathing suit. I promise. It's lovely."

Graham said, "It's a madhouse. I don't see how Mort stands it."

"He loves it. It's fun. Lizzie will have a good time. Anyhow, she can't stay here all summer by herself."

Liz had overheard them argue about this. Graham was a salesman of roofing materials, but by 1938 there was less and less construction, and finally none, only some repairs as absolutely necessary. He made his rounds of dealers in the morning, and was at home reading the morning newspaper when Liz came home from school. In the late afternoon he would heave himself out of the leather chair, put on an apron and start dinner preparations—peel potatoes and put them on to boil, slamming pots and pans.

Dorothy had found a job at Mandel

Brothers selling gloves and scarves, to supplement their meager income. When she came home at six o'clock, Graham angrily tossed the apron to her and sat down to read the evening paper she brought home. If someone dropped in while he was in the kitchen, he would not answer the door.

But there was the problem of what to do with Elizabeth all summer. "She can't stay home alone all day, and that's for sure," Liz heard Dorothy say.

Then Graham in a high, nasal, whiny voice, "Well, you don't think *I* should stay home with her? Little enough sales as it is. There wouldn't be any if I didn't call on a few old accounts."

"Things will get better. Lizzie will have a good time. It's all settled."

So there they were, walking down the boardwalk laid on the sand between wild grape vines and scrub evergreens, to the little cottage. To Liz it looked like the witch's cottage with its sloping roof and small dormer windows. Aunt Sarah stood in the doorway, waving welcome with a dish towel. The sisters kissed, and then Sarah hugged Elizabeth who stood stiffly with her arms at her sides. "My, how she's grown!"

There was a strong resemblance between the two sisters. Their voices could not be told apart on the telephone, but Sarah was cushiony where Dorothy was spare, and she smelled of bread and spices and laundry soap, where Dorothy carried the smoke smell of the train they had taken, and her floral perfume. She wore a grey rayon dress she often wore to work, and silk stockings and high heels. Liz thought that was superior, but she was aware that Dorothy looked out of place among the tan, casually-dressed vacationers, and felt badly for her. She wished Dorothy would go straight home. At the same time she clung to her mother's hand, trying to feel stoic about exile.

"Now here's Cissie. And you two can run and play." Cissie was thirteen and had small bosoms and a short haircut. The two girls circled each other like dogs. Then there was Julia who at seventeen was languid and

beautiful. Dorothy admired both girls—Lizzie thought, to excess, and disparaging to herself.

Before Dorothy left she said to Sarah, "I'm grateful to you. Thanks so much. Lizzie, be a good girl."

"Don't be silly. Our pleasure," Sarah said. "Cissie will be glad to have a playmate. And you come out as often as you like."

"Well, I can't take a day off work. I work Saturdays, too. And Sunday is always so busy. Everything to do..." Her voice trailed off.

The truth was that they didn't have a car, and often didn't have train fare. Graham said, "Take the train, and then Mort has to meet us. Poor son of a bitch, chauffeur every Sunday, and waiting on everybody. I wouldn't do it." What he really liked was a quiet Sunday listening to the baseball game on radio while Dorothy cleaned and laundered and cooked.

After the first few lonesome days, Liz had to admit that she was having a good time. She and Cissie played on the beach and swam every day. Aunt Sarah said, "You and Cissie are buddies now. You must never swim alone. That's our one rule. Promise?"

Liz tanned, grew brown and sleek, while Cissie burned and peeled all summer, even though she slathered with sunburn cream. Liz was like a dark chick among the blond, fair-skinned relatives. Julia asked, "How come she's so dark?" and Liz overheard Sarah say, "It's from her father. Her father's side of the family," with the implication that it wasn't quite as good as being blond.

Liz was aware of her status as poor relation and made herself ostentatiously helpful, setting the table before she was asked to, making her bed each morning, helping fold the laundry on Monday, and generally getting in the way until Sarah would send her outside to play with Cissie. Cissie said, "You don't have to be such a goody-good. I'm not." She was swinging on the rubber

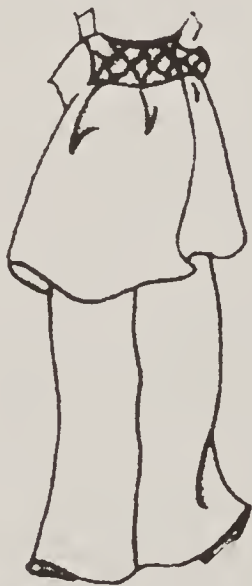
tire hung from a tree branch.

Liz gave her a little push. "But you're her daughter. You don't have to."

"You don't have to, either." Cissie kicked her feet out and swung higher.

At times Cissie remembered that she was thirteen and disdained to play with Elizabeth. Liz would mope around, or follow Sarah or Julia until they persuaded Cissie to relent, or Cissie grew bored, and they went off to pick blueberries in the dunes for Sarah to bake a pie.

Julia came and went on her own schedule, sleeping late, spending hours doing her hair, her nails, and out the door when a horn honked. "That's Artie," Cissie explained, peering out the window.



Artie had a square jaw and blue eyes. He wore white flannel slacks and a shirt the color of his eyes—short sleeves, with the sleeves rolled up two more turns to show more of his brawn. Liz thought she had never seen anyone so handsome outside the movies. Artie kissed Julia on the mouth, gave Cissie a squeeze, and turned toward Liz. "What have we here? Another beautiful lady!"

As he approached, Liz felt that she would choke. Her heart was beating hard in the back of her throat. Before he could shake her hand, she ran, threw herself down on her bed, her face in the pillow, but still she could hear their laughter. Cissie came onto the porch and asked, "What's the matter with you?"

Liz kept her tear-stained face turned away. "I suddenly didn't feel well," she said in a faint little voice.

"So, it didn't have anything to do with Artie?" Cissie was grinning.

"No! Certainly not! I get these spells sometimes. That's all. Nothing to worry about."

She made a languorous gesture with a limp little hand, as if to indicate there was much more to say, but she was forbearing.

She had immediately fallen in love with Artie, and hoped fervently she would never see him again, after acting like such a fool. She was angry at herself, and at Julia for being the one he loved. She fantasized getting rid of Julia and making Artie love her, but then she thought she would have to wait six years until she, too, was seventeen, and that was forever, and by that time Artie would be an old man.

Elizabeth and Cissie swam every day, wading into the clear, cold water, splashing each other, until they could finally bear to submerge. The smooth surface of the lake was made up of ribbons of green and purple laid down to the horizon.

Liz loved the silky feel of water sliding past her body. She would give herself over to it, trusting that it would sustain her weight. She floated on her back, looking up at a blue sky ribbed with little white clouds that looked to Liz like the cotton puffs Julia put between her toes waiting for the polish to dry. Happy. Purely happy floating weightless, moving with the clouds.

Some days they walked a long distance up the beach, watching for boys. Cissie wore a towel around her shoulders to keep from sunburning again. Light reflected from tiny waves pricked their eyes and they turned back. They followed the neat, staccato tracks of sandpipers. Always in a hurry, the little birds would run until the girls got close, and then take off. They shooed seagulls away from dead fish, and collected pretty stones and tiny shells.

When they grew tired of this, Sarah gave them money and they walked up to town for ice cream cones. A pair of boys walked toward them on the sidewalk. Liz started swinging her arms and walking with a little extra twitch of her buttocks. When the boys were abreast, Liz said loudly, "Oh, my God! I'm dying for a cigarette!"

Cissie looked back furtively, embarrassed, but the boys had continued on their way. Then she and Liz started laughing, fell on each other and laughed until they could hardly stand up.

Elizabeth and Cissie slept on cots on the big, screened porch off the living room. At first Elizabeth had difficulty falling asleep. It took time before she was used to the sound of crickets and cicadas, and the rhythmic

pulse of waves on the shore—sometimes soft, sometimes raging. She missed traffic noises and the screech of the street car in the distance. She thought of herself as a misplaced city girl. She asked, "Did you sleep out here alone before I came?"

"No, Julia and I share the bedroom upstairs."

"You don't have to sleep out here with me, just because I'm here."

"Oh, I *want* to," Cissie said generously.

"Well, I'm glad you do," equally generous. Then she added, "But *I'm* used to sleeping *alone*."

The two girls whispered for a long time before they fell asleep. Cissie asked, "Do you *like* boys?"

"Well, I guess they're all right."

"Did a boy ever kiss you?"

"No. Did you?"

"Yes. Once. At a party. Someone turned off the lights and everybody was kissing, and someone kissed me." She laughed. "Then her parents came in and turned the lights on again and it was a mess. They were so mad! We all had to leave."

"Did you like it?"

"It wasn't really anything much. I wasn't even sure who it was!"

And so on, until Sarah would open the door, standing in the rectangle of light that spilled out over the wooden boards of the porch floor, and tell them to stop talking and go to sleep.

A continuing problem for Elizabeth was that she often had to pee in the night. To do so in the one bathroom upstairs, she would have had to cross through the living room, climb the squeaky stairs, pass the bedrooms where Sarah and Mort, and Julia were sleeping, and flush the noisy toilet. Instead, she opened the porch door soundlessly and slipped outside. The first time gave her a chill of fear, but after that it became routine, and she enjoyed the early morning when dark had lifted but light had not yet arrived. Shapes were delineated but color was not apparent. Everything was still as a scene painted in monochrome—black, grey, a hint of silver in the dark grey sheet of water repetitiously sounding. She liked being alone in this disembodied world. She liked the feel of dune grass on her bottom when she squatted to pee in the sand.

One early morning, while she squatted, a ghost materialized before her—tan legs, bare feet with red toenails. Julia said, "What the hell are you doing? You scared the day-lights out of me!"

"I just had to pee." Liz stood. "You scared me, too."

Julia carried her shoes and looked tired, bedraggled. "Why are you doing it out here like a dog!"



"I didn't want to wake everybody upstairs."

"Go inside!" and she led the way. Liz knew better than to retort, "Why are you just coming home when it is almost time to get up?"

On a cool, rainy day, house-bound, the girls paged through every dog-eared, crumpled magazine that had accumulated over the past summers. Rain dripped monotonously from the leaves of the poplar tree outside the living room, tapped on the roof, ran over the gutters and curtained the porch in a sheet of water. Cissie whined, "But there's nothing to *do*!"

Sarah called out, "You can help me clean the kitchen."

"Oh, big deal! Just what I want to do!" She punched the couch pillows and fell back on them.

Liz went upstairs and took a pack of fortune-telling cards she had recently acquired on one of their forays into Woolworth's, out of the dresser drawer that was hers. She laid cards out in rows on a little wicker table in the living room, and pondered them. Cissie sat up, then got up and sat across from Liz. "What does it say?"

"It says it's raining." Cissie made a face. "It says...now, wait a minute!" Liz covered her eyes with one hand, her head back. "It says—oh, are you sure you want to hear this?"

"Yes! Yes! Go on!"

"It says you're going to marry a tall dark man with a wooden leg."

Cissie burst out laughing. "Oh, Lizzie! That's silly."

Liz continued seriously, "See? It's right here. In the cards. The cards don't lie. And you're going to have ten children, all with wooden legs."

Cissie hooted. "The cards don't say any such thing. You're making the whole thing up. Don't try to kid me."

"I wouldn't try to kid you because you're such a kid yourself," and she mussed up the careful arrangement, put the cards back in the box. They were both smiling, and at that moment the sun came out and they raced to the beach.

The air was fresh, rain-washed, pungent. Liz said, "It smells like water."

Cissie laughed. "Water doesn't smell, you silly. How could it smell? It's just *water*." Elizabeth punched her. "Ow! Why did you do that?"

A big, shaggy brown dog bounded up the beach to them. Cissie grew tense, but Elizabeth petted him. To her delight, he rolled over so that she could scratch his stomach, and Cissie petted him, too. "What a nice dog!" Liz said. "I have a dog just like him."

"Oh? What's his name?"

"Spot."

"Spot? That's a funny name for a brown dog. For a dog like that."

"Well, remember 'See Spot run'? Well, he runs, so that's what I call him."

Mort came out on the train every night, and had dinner with Sarah when it was almost the girls' bedtime. He was wiry, pleasant and remote, not at all like her paunchy, choleric father. Liz liked him, and then felt disloyal.

Almost every weekend there were guests—sometimes invited, sometimes not—friends or relatives from the city. Sarah made them welcome in her warm, motherly way, while Mort stood aside, smoking cigars, subsumed by loud, maternal authoritative Sarah. He had a high, boyish laugh at everything and nothing that Liz could see was funny. Sometimes she thought he was silly. But she had heard her mother say admiringly that he made such a good living. Graham answered, "I could, too, if I had inherited a business. I had to struggle. And for what?"

The guests often brought their own picnic baskets. They would put their drinks in the

refrigerator and go upstairs to change into bathing suits and use the bathroom. They left their clothes in the small room with a slanting ceiling that held Liz's clothes and Cissie's toys and books. Too small even for a bed, it had a dresser, two chairs and a small table. These would be piled with the clothing, purses, shoes, of the guests, with little canvas suitcases on the floor everywhere.

On the other side of the hall was the master bedroom, and Julia's room which had two beds and Cissie's clothes in the closet. Liz liked to go into Julia's room and look at her pretty dresses, sit at her dressing table and smell her perfume, poke a tentative finger into her powder and rouge, brush her hair with Julia's brush.

When there were guests, she went into the small room and looked at their clothing, too, sniffing it, holding up a blouse or shirt against her own chest, trying on shoes. She went through pants' pockets and purses. If she found a lot of change, she took a quarter or a dime and put it in her own change purse in the dresser drawer. Once she found a condom in Uncle Willard's pocket. She held it in her hand and looked at it without a clue to its use, but knowing somehow that it was dirty, and that she couldn't ask anyone about it, before she put it back carefully.

So when Liz and Cissie walked up to town for ice cream, or occasionally to see a movie, Liz said, "I'll treat."

"You don't have to. My mother gave me money for both of us."



"Well, you keep it, and I'll treat. My father gave me a lot of money. He doesn't want me to be dependent on anyone."

They shopped at the dime store. Liz bought a lipstick. Cissie laughed and said, "What are you going to do with that?"

"I'll have it as soon as my parents let me use it. I think that'll be pretty soon." Liz always left the store with more than she had

paid for. When Cissie admired an enamel bracelet she sported, Liz said, "My friend at school gave it to me."

Cissie said, "A boy friend, I bet."

Liz let it be known with a little smile that that was a possibility. "Here," she said, putting it on Cissie's wrist. "You can have it."



leeping on the porch, the girls could clearly overhear conversations that went on in the living room after their bedtime. Liz heard Sarah say, "He's not even making a living. It's so hard on poor Dotty."

Mort answered, "He's in the wrong line. He's just not the salesman *type*. He isn't friendly or smiling. I don't think he really likes people. He always seems angry."

"Well, that's because he's not a success. Poor Dotty." Sarah sighed, and then their voices lowered, or Liz fell asleep in spite of herself, lulled by the waves into a dream-scape.

That night when she had to pee, she thought the lake was such a big dark space, it might just as well not be there, except that she heard its reassuring *shush, shush*. She pretended that the dune ended at the bottom of the hill, and that after that there was nothing and if she went down there she would fall, probably to China, so she was relieved to crawl back into bed.

Sometimes, Sarah and Mort went upstairs early and Liz and Cissie could talk aloud as long as they pleased. Cissie said knowingly, "They're probably doing it."

"What?"

"You know. Sex."

"Oh," After a pause Elizabeth said, "I'm never going to get married." She believed that grown-ups had to be married to have sex, and that they did it in their sleep. Otherwise, she could not explain to herself the little she knew and tried to understand.

She could hear the smile in Cissie's voice when she said, "What do you know? You're just a child."

"I'm not. I know a lot."

"Oh, yeah? Do you know what vagina means?"

"Of course. Pussy."

"Pussy? What's that?"

Liz had overheard eighth-grade boys talking quite explicitly about pussy and understood that they didn't mean a cat. When she

asked her mother what it meant, Dorothy's reaction told her that the word had power, although she didn't understand why. Dorothy said, "Where did you hear that? Forget it! Forget it immediately. I never want to hear you say that again. And don't ever let your father catch you saying that!"

"Pussy. You know. Same as vagina," Liz said with such a superior air that Cissie was led to continue.

"Then tell me what's intercourse."

"That's easy. Commerce between nations."

Cissie laughed so hard that Elizabeth threw

didn't mean to say that." She pulled Liz down beside her on the cot and put her arms around her. "What was going on?"

When Liz could speak, she only said, "Nobody likes me."

"That's not so at all!" Aunt Sarah protested. "Is it, Cissie? It's just that I don't want you and Cissie to fight. Promise?"

Cissie sniffed, feeling neglected. "I wasn't fighting. *She* was fighting *me*!"

By this time Mort had come downstairs, too, and even Julia. Sarah returned to the living room. Elizabeth heard her say, "Strange



the covers back, jumped out of bed and onto Cissie, pummeling her until she called for her mother, and Sarah appeared in the doorway in her nightgown. "What's going on here? Elizabeth! Stop that!" and pulled her off. "What's going on?"

Elizabeth stood with clenched fists, red face, looking at the floor. "Cissie was laughing at me."

"Well, no wonder! Look at you! But that's no reason to beat her up. If you girls can't get along, we'll have to send Elizabeth home. Why were you laughing, Cissie?"

Cissie was still crying, and she only shook her head, but now Elizabeth began to sob. The thought of long mornings by herself in the apartment, and afternoons with her irascible father struck her—big, gulping sobs, feeling sorry for herself, not for beating up on Cissie, angry at the world that was so unjust to her.

Sarah was alarmed. "Now, now, Lizzie. I didn't mean that. Of course you may stay. I

child."

Mort asked, "What was happening?"

"I don't know. And Cissie is being so protective. She won't tell me either. Strange child. Comes of being an only child in that household."

Julia said, "She's a little devil."

Sarah continued, "Strange. Good as gold one minute, and then a perfect fury."

Mort said, "Graham has a temper like that."

Liz hoped Cissie wouldn't tell, but knew that she had by the suppressed smiles Julia and Sarah tried to hide next morning. She vowed revenge.

To ingratiate herself with Sarah, Liz picked a bunch of lupine and Indian paint brush as an offering, and was surprised when Sarah didn't seem pleased. "I think we should leave things in nature where they are, don't you? But these are lovely, Lizzie. As long as you've picked them already. Thank you very much," as she arranged them in a green

ceramic vase.

That night Cissie had the good grace to apologize for laughing the night before. Elizabeth said, "I knew all along what you were talking about. I just said that to be funny. And you sure thought I was funny, didn't you? Got me into trouble. Nearly got me sent home!"

She sounded so hurt that Cissie wanted to make amends when they returned to their favorite topic. She offered up a real secret. "Julie and Artie do it."

"Really?" Elizabeth sat up in bed. "How do

pranced. When she was exhausted she spit sand out of her mouth, shook it out of her hair, brushed at her stomach and legs. She waded into the lake to rinse, finally submerged. Then, shivering, she put on her sandy nightgown and climbed slowly up the hill, onto the porch, and into bed.

In the morning Sarah noticed sand on the floor, in the bed, on the damp pillow, and scolded. "When did you swim? You know you're forbidden to swim by yourself. That's our one rule. You could drown and no one would hear you."



Illustration by Julie Rubinger, Grade 6
University Elementary, Bloomington, Indiana

you know?"

"I saw them once. On the beach."

"What did it look like?"

"Artie was on top of her and kind of wiggling around."

"Wouldn't that hurt? But how do you know that's what they were doing?"

"What else could it be? Anyhow, I just know."

Liz was horrified and elated to share knowledge that was so deliciously bad.

In the early morning she had to go outside to pee. She thought now that when she saw Julia before dawn that time, Julia and Artie had probably just been doing it. She stood and looked around at the dark shapes of trees, the neighboring houses black, colorless. Suddenly she ran, leaping, lurching down the dune to the beach. She threw off her nightgown and twirled, arms raised, danced, fell to the sand and rolled, leaped up again. She could picture Julia with Artie wiggling on top of her and she wiggled and

Liz said with mild astonishment, "I didn't go swimming!"

"Elizabeth. Your bed is damp and full of sand. How did that happen?"

"I don't know. I didn't go swimming," Liz said stubbornly. "Maybe I was walking in my sleep."

"Swimming in your sleep?" incredulously.

"I wasn't swimming. I didn't go swimming. Maybe it was one of my spells."

Sarah shook her head. That evening after the dishes were washed, she phoned Dorothy. Liz busied herself in the kitchen, drying each plate carefully, and then each fork, knife and spoon, in order to hear the entire conversation. She heard Sarah say, "Oh, she's a sweet child. So helpful. And how are you? And Graham?"

There was a long pause while Dorothy complained, then Sarah said carefully, "I don't want to alarm you, Dotty, but did Elizabeth ever have any kind of spells? Where she doesn't remember what she's

done or where she's been?" Liz could hear Dorothy laugh at first and then speak seriously. Sarah answered, "No, I don't think so. Two or three times. I think perhaps she fell in the lake during one of those spells." Then Sarah listened for a long time while Dorothy reassured her sister, explained the problems of coming out to get Elizabeth, and so forth. Finally Sarah interrupted, "Well, if you think so. It *would* be a shame. She's having such a good time. You should see her. Brown as a berry. She seems very healthy."

Later, Sarah told Mort, "I hated to tell Dorothy. She has so much on her mind as it is. But she didn't take it very seriously. I think it could be dangerous. If she were my child, I'd get her to a doctor, but Dotty...Maybe it's the money." Liz was thrilled, strained to hear more, delighted to be the subject of concern, even if it wasn't her own parents.

The next voice was Julia's, full of contempt. "You don't believe that, do you? It's all baloney. She's a big faker." Liz was immediately sorry she had never told on Julia for coming home just before dawn. Julia continued, "She's pretty good at it, if she has all of you fooled. She doesn't fool me."

"That's not kind, Julia."

"I can't stand her."

Every August weekend brought visitors and replenished Elizabeth's change purse. It occurred to her that she had better not take home more money than she came with, and she bought little presents for everybody at Woolworth's. She bought a small painted china vase for Sarah, wrapped it in tissue and presented it so sweetly, saying, "Thank you for having me," that Sarah gave her a hug and said, "Thank *you*! You're a sweet child. But you really shouldn't have spent your money on us." She looked at the little vase, then put it on a shelf in the mission oak sideboard, next to the majolica plate.

Liz gave Cissie a little puzzle game where you had to move squares around in a frame. "For rainy days." She bought a shoe horn for Mort, and even gave Julia a gift of nail polish in the color she liked.

The next time they saw the brown dog on the beach, Liz called to him, "Here, Lance."

Cissie said, "How come you're calling him Lance?"



"I don't know. I guess because that's *my* dog's name."

Cissie looked carefully at her. "I thought you said your dog's name was Spot."

"Oh, yes, it is. Lance was my first dog. This dog's name is Spot. He's smaller. For an apartment, you know."

Liz was especially lavish with gifts for Cissie, and Cissie reciprocated in the night with her most cherished secret. First she required, "You have to cross your heart and hope to die if you ever tell."

"I won't tell, I promise."

"If you ever tell, I'll kill you."

"I won't. I just crossed my heart."

A pause, and then Cissie whispered, "Julia's going to have a baby."

"What! When? You mean now?" Elizabeth sat up in bed. She felt as though she had eaten something unbearably spicy that settled where she thought her heart might be. "Are you sure? How do you know? Are they married?"

"Julia told me. But she hasn't even told Mama. So if you even whisper it, I'll kill you."

"Are they married? Does Artie know?"

"Of course he knows. He's the one who did it to her."

Just then Sarah appeared in the doorway and shushed them, and by the time Liz thought the adults had gone upstairs, Cissie was asleep. She didn't know how Cissie could possibly sleep, with such an explosive secret, and longed to know more.

Elizabeth appointed herself to watch Julia, studying her stomach, following her, trying to see if she looked any different, and how would anyone know.

Julia said crossly, "Why don't you go out and play? Have a swim. Take a walk or something. Get lost." She complained to Sarah, "She follows me around like a dog. Like a spaniel or something, with those dark eyes watching me all the time. I ought to pat her on the head or something. Put her on a leash."

"That isn't kind, Julia. She's our guest. And only for the summer."

"She's a nuisance." Artie thought so, too, and gave Liz and Cissie each a nickel to go into town and buy an ice cream cone.

Elizabeth stopped yearning for Artie to love her, knowing what he had done to Julia. The knowledge weighed heavily. She had never shared a secret of such importance. She could hardly bear the responsibility.

On the next rainy day, Elizabeth got out her fortune-telling cards. She predicted that Cissie would be a teacher when she grew up. Then she offered to tell Julia's fortune.

At first Julia refused. But summer was drawing to a close, and Julia felt a little guilty about her attitude toward Elizabeth. She knew that she had been unusually prickly because she was preoccupied with her own predicament. She sat at the little wicker

Ask Any Child?

Who dares to chase
the Golden butterfly
predict its arrival;
departure, follow
its ordained flight?
Is it not the *poete maudit*
who claims this measure,
in slanted light;
extolling its beauty
at rest; in flight;
offers no explanation
but to say, "Ask any child?"
I did and the reply,
a nod of head.

—J.L. Kubicek
Lake Crystal, Minnesota

table across from Liz while Liz solemnly laid out the cards.

Liz moved the cards around, trying to look thoughtful and mysterious. Then she pulled the queen from the bottom of the deck where she had put it and said, with a friendly smile, "That's you, Julia. The princess. I see a lovely future." Another few cards and she turned up the joker. "That's dancing and having fun in life. A little wild."

"That's true enough," Julia said ruefully.

"You'll live a long time and be happy." A

ten, a nine, and then Liz turned up the two of hearts which had a picture of a cherub.

"Cupid, I guess," Cissie said, looking over Julia's shoulder, getting a little nervous. "Love! Love! Love!"

"No," Liz said solemnly. "That's a baby. A baby coming." She held her breath, modestly waiting for acclaim for her prescience.

Sarah smiled and said, "I should hope so. Some day," and was amazed to see Julia's face turn red, her mouth tremble, speechless with fury. "What's the matter, Julia? Don't take this so seriously. It's only a child's game."

Julia jumped to her feet. The table tipped over, the cards flew. She grabbed Liz and shook her until her hair flew and her teeth rattled. "You little bitch! You sneaking, lying little bitch!" She slapped Liz with the flat of her hand, and again on the back stroke, leaving red welts on both tan cheeks.

Sarah screamed, "Julia!" and tried to separate them. Julia threw Elizabeth across the room onto the wicker couch, nearly overturning it with force of her landing. Then she fell into Sarah's arms, sobbing, screaming, "How can you have that lying little bitch around! Send her back to her no-good parents! I never want to see her again. Lying, sneaking, spying on me all summer!"

Elizabeth was wailing loudly, too—physically hurt, and this last added insult. "I never did," she defended herself.

"Then how did you know?"

"Cissie told me," Liz said righteously.

"Cissie! Damn you!" Julia screamed, struggled, but Sarah held her. And then Cissie joined the chorus of wailing.

"What are you all talking about?" Sarah cried. "What is going on here?" She looked from one weeping girl to the other. "Cissie told you," she repeated. "Told you what? What did Cissie...?" putting it all together with sudden insight, and her own face crumpled into tears of sorrow and dismay. "Oh, Julia!" was all she could say.

Elizabeth stared at Cissie's angry red face, Julia's tear-streaked fury, Sarah's face pale, mouth open, eyes brimming with tears. She picked herself up, wiped her eyes with the back of her hand, and went upstairs to pack her small suitcase.

Joanne Zimmerman lives
in Homewood, Illinois.

To Gramms

Christmas belongs to my Gramms.
She cooked for weeks in preparation.
You could smell good food as soon as you walked in.
She knew just how to spoil you—
presents stacked as tall as the tree.

She was the queen of school vacations.
A day off meant a day of fun at Gramms'.
I ate lunch in her living room while watching T.V. —
something that was never allowed in my house.
I always came home with a new toy.
Whether I found it in her basement
or whether it was a present made no difference.

I was never afraid to cry while she held me in her arms,
comforting me, telling me everything would be all right.
I always believed her because, somehow, a day at Gramms'
made all of my problems disappear.
I always knew if she was proud of me
or whether what I had done was not the right thing to do.

As I got older, I learned about grace and elegance
from watching Gramms. When I looked at her,
I could see my own mother's reflection. As I got even older,
I started to see myself.

I continue to see my mother and Gramms in me more
and more every day. Now that she is no longer with us,
I long to sit in her lap while she gives me a hug.
I want to tell her how scared I am, and have her tell me
everything will be all right.

There are nights when I just sit and think about her.
Sometimes I try to talk with her.
I wonder if she knows when I'm hurting or scared.
Will she see me on Prom Night
or cheer for me on Graduation Day?
The one thing I hope for the most is that she is proud of me.

Christmas is still fun.
But something is missing.
The presents are still stacked up as tall as the tree.
But, now it is my house that smells like good food for weeks.
After all the hand-knitted stockings Gramms made us
are passed out, there is always one remaining.
It is left there as a memory.

I'll never forget you, Gramms.
One day, we will be back together again.
Everything will be all right.

—Kristin Schwantie, Age 18
Wheeling High School
Wheeling, Illinois

Chang Liu, Grade 6 in 1998
University Elementary
Bloomington, Indiana



Dana's Willow

Motherless child in a season
of gray, you have never known the slenderness
of willow or its whip-song.

I come searching the creekside
for this childhood comfort: winter silver
like a memory of fur.
You watch from the park swings.

I know only your name and some
gossip: you are new to our north
after a death. Pussy willows bloom
far over my head. When I reach
you are beside me.

It takes one of us to pull them down
while the other slides the stems
slant-wise, stripping and twisting
to break them free. We harvest
and harvest, oblivious to the cold
that numbs our hands and flushes our cheeks.
Our bare fingers bleed.

The pending sky sends down a chafe of flakes
and we wade through marsh grass,
laden with scentless bouquet.
You turn and wave then disappear
up a gravel lane where I have never traveled.

I hope I taught you willow
as your mother might have done:
forgiving winter,
setting dark branches
in a dry vase on the kitchen table
to be there
when you come home from school.

—Joanne Clarkson
Aberdeen, Washington



The Subpoena

Your mother says
I can no longer stay.
Gather my things.
It is difficult for me to leave.

It is not of my choosing
To leave you behind.

It breaks my heart to leave you.
You have managed to smile,
Despite your own pain.
For that, I am proud of you.

You forgave me, when
In my pain and weakness,
I failed to acknowledge you.
I still love you.

It is not of my choosing
To leave you behind.

One day, we will walk together.
Until then,
I must walk alone.
With you in my thoughts.

So go to sleep little one.
Sleep under the gum-drop moon,
And cotton-candy clouds.
Stay warm.

It is not of my choosing
to leave you behind.

—Chris Mauch
Merrillville, Indiana

B I K E

by Daniel Nalbor



Illustration by the late Millie Hunter

I don't know if this is a good idea, you guys," I said, my squeaky little voice just slightly more squeaky than usual.

"Aw, what's wrong? Are you chicken?" my friend Mike asked, politely pointing out my fear to everyone.

"C'mon," my other friend Tim added. "Don't be a baby."

It was nice how my friends were being so supportive.

I looked down at the ground, then up at my friends, and then at the source of all my problems.

"I just don't know, guys. It looks really scary."

I was looking at the biggest bike ramp I had ever seen in my life. It was probably only a foot tall, now that I think about it. But in the eyes of an eight-year-old, it was just massive. It was made of pieces of spare wood we had found in Tim's garage and had nailed together. It had a picture of a skull on it—or at least a picture of something that sort of looked like a skull that Tim's older brother had drawn. For that little added touch of danger, it had extra nails sticking out of its sides in every direction.

We had been working on it all week. Now it was judgement day.

Our ramp was sitting at the end of Tim's driveway and we were sitting on our bikes at the top. We chose Tim's driveway because it was the steepest and would allow us to achieve maximum velocity in the shortest period of time Y. That was Tim's brother's idea.

He was a big fat dork.

"Fine, then, I'll go first," Tim said. With a scream, he started peddling down the driveway as fast as he could. He just kept gaining speed until he hit the ramp dead on and went flying, making a perfect landing a few feet farther.

"Wow!" Mike said to me. "That looked really easy."

Off Mike went, speeding down the driveway just as Tim had. He made it, too, making the whole thing look just as easy as Tim had.

"I guess it's my turn," I said to myself.

"Hey, Dan, it's your turn!" Mike yelled to me from the street.

"I know," I yelled in reply.

I sat on my bike, staring at that stupid ramp for what seemed like forever. I knew I would have to try the jump or suffer the humiliation of being a baby.

"Don't be a weenie!" Mike yelled.

"Don't be a wuss!" Tim yelled.

"Don't be a pansy-ass bitch!" Tim's older brother yelled at me from his bedroom window upstairs.

Asshole!

I needed no more convincing. So I started peddling as fast as I could down the driveway, gaining as much speed as I could with every second. I got going so fast I was sure I was going to make it. Nothing could stop me. But that was the whole problem—nothing could stop me as I went flying off the ramp in some weird sideways direction at some ungodly speed.

I saw my short life flash before my eyes for one brief moment before my head bounced on the pavement. I didn't see much of anything after that.

A bit later, though, I did hear a single voice. A woman's voice.

"He's bleeding a lot. I think he's gonna need stitches."

Daniel Nalbor, who was 18 and attending The University of Chicago Laboratory Schools High School at the time he wrote this, lives in Crown Point, Indiana.



Simple as a Cloud

The imagery is simple as a cloud.
Your big hands stroke the backbone of the child.
Touch is a song of solace after hurt,
Spare rain darkening your denim shirt.

My grip is white as winter on the sill.
The wind clean cuts the evening into chill.
I watch grim tenderness through curtain lace.
Who can fathom how sorrow works my face?

—Sandra Fowler
West Columbia, West Virginia

Neighbor Girl

The child next door
appears every evening
full of talk of day and school,
arms fly in punctuation
as I stand, turned slightly from her,
hold the hose and murmur
through the splash.
If I make the grown-up mistake
and ask too many questions
she dries up like my
starving plants, so
I sprinkle the grass seed,
sniff star jasmine's night gift,
lend my ear for whatever
she chooses to say.

—Patricia Wellingham-Jones
Tehama, California

Haiku

Time attacks the mind,
erodes the environment,
children make mud pies

—Shirley Jo Moritz
Merrillville, Indiana

Haiku

Gone to Florida
the Dairy Queen sign reads
leaves crunch underfoot

—Shirley Jo Moritz
Merrillville, Indiana

Mother Believes

My father, in heaven, watches us,
still wears his blue and gray uniform,
his corporal's badge,
leather holster and gun, tall brown boots.
Even when he's reading the news
or fishing, he's listening for our voices,
in case we call to him.
That's what she says.

I'd like to see him
stand up on the bandmaster's stage
in Memorial Park, on John C. Fremont Day,
when the whole town is gathered,
frown his great black eyebrows
and proclaim: *This is my daughter. I named her.*
Whoever harms her, answers to me.

—Sondra Upham
Plymouth, Massachusetts

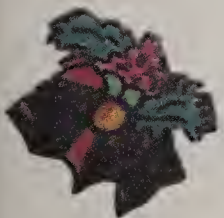
Escape

Mommy's in the hospital
again.
This time she cut her fingers,
one by one,
and watched them bleed
into the bath water.
Ruthie heard her crying,
saw the towel
smeared with blood,
called her dad from dinner dishes,
and ran outside to swing, swing,
swing again.

The soft rain sifts down
like powdered sugar.
Ruthie sits in the sandbox
patting damp sand
into doll dishes.
This morning Mommy got up
before anyone,
burned the toast and eggs,
burned the dish towels,
burned her hands.
Now Mommy's gone
again.

I'm not here,
Ruthie answers
when Daddy calls her name.
She slips
between the hedges, runs
the alley to the culvert.
Once inside
she crouches, finds
a seat, holds a dried leaf
for a ticket.
Waits for wheels to rumble
and take her far, far,
far away.

—Jane McClellan
Ocala, Florida



Universe Abandoned

For Celeste

More than a year after the cosmic rift
that created your independent galaxy,
I enter your abandoned universe
and navigate the comets of clothes
and boxes of space junk
that are its only population.

Sun, moon, stars remain
in stationary orbit on the ceiling.
"They glow" you said,
teetering on your bed
as you affixed them in their proper paths.

I pause, remembering
how we named you for the heavens—
Celeste—our little star.
You grew up the solitary light
in our self-enclosed parsec of space.

I turn out the lamp
and close the door on your
abandoned cosmos.
Your planetarium ceiling again
sheds luminescence
on the space where your molten core
cooled, and coded your consciousness.

When the white light fades
and darkness overcomes me,
I breathe in your remaining life force.
By the light of the rising moon
I peel away your plastic galaxy
and feel the shift in my maternal universe.

—Billie Morrill
Niantic, Connecticut



Childhood

The last time
I saw you
was on an endless open sea
where you danced
playfully
to the rhythm
of the distant waves.

Your face shone
as the brightness
of the sun
reflected your smile.

Your eyes glistened
to the hue
of the vast
blue sky.

You were
forever—
your arms
stretched out
like an eagle's
you flew away
never to be seen
again.

—Cathy Michniewicz
Whiting, Indiana

Art by Erik Hunter, Age 14, Tampa, Florida



YOUNG LOVE

by Christina Dotson

Kyle stared at the note. I sat at my desk on the other side of our fifth grade classroom and watched him nervously. I couldn't tell what he was thinking because he was careful to keep his face totally blank. We were supposed to be studying this one really boring chapter in our science books. If Kyle looked even the least bit interested in something, Mrs. Ratzel would know he wasn't reading about cloud formations, and she would swoop down on him in no time. Then she would find the note, and we would both be in trouble.

I sat at my desk and bit my nails. My heart was thumping like that rabbit on *Bambi*, and my stomach felt like it had that time I ate three-week-old Chinese food.

I felt just like I did last summer at the amusement park, right before I went on my first-ever roller coaster ride. Standing in that long line, I hadn't been sure if I should be excited or scared. I didn't know if I was about to have the time of my life, or if my life was about to end. Either way, I just wanted the ride to be over. I hated the waiting.

Kyle had been there with me, that day in line at the amusement park. Since he's a whole three inches taller than I am, he had already been on the roller coaster the year before. At one point, I got myself so worked up that I was about ready to duck out of line and head back to the bumper cars. That's when Kyle turned to me and flashed me his famous grin, the one that all the other girls in the fifth grade say is "soooo cute!"

"Don't sweat it, 'Manda," he said. Kyle hardly ever takes the time to pronounce the "A" at the beginning of my name. "This is nothin'. 'Sides, you gotta at least try it once. C'mon, don't be a chicken."

Kyle knew I was no chicken. He also knows how to get me to do things. I guess that's because he knows *me* so well. Kyle and I have been best friends our whole lives—all ten years of our lives—and up until this year, it never mattered that he was a boy and I was a girl. We were just Amanda

and Kyle, the only two kids on our block who'd ever had the guts to retrieve a Frisbee from grouchy old Mrs. Nesbit's flower garden.

But this year, all of that changed. Now I had girls I barely knew coming up to me and saying stuff like, "That Kyle is such a hunk!" and "What a babe. You are so lucky, Amanda!" I didn't have a clue what any of them were talking about. At least, not until today, when this girl Sabrina came right out and asked me, "Isn't Kyle your boyfriend?"

"My boyfriend?" I exclaimed. "Ew, how gross!"

Sabrina gave me a look like I had just rolled off the loony wagon.

"Boys aren't gross, any more, Amanda," she said. "We're in the fifth grade now. The days of cooties are over with. Now we're into cuties!"

I thought that was pretty funny, but Sabrina was serious.

Kyle is the hottest guy in our class! If you don't claim him as your boyfriend, someone else will. You *do* like Kyle, don't you?"

Stacy Graan-Wilson



I thought about that. Of course I liked Kyle; he was my best friend. But did I like him the way everyone expected me to like him? I wasn't sure about that. I wasn't even sure how it felt to really *like* a guy. Maybe I did like Kyle, and I just hadn't realized it before.

So that's why I wrote the note, and passed it to Kyle during science class. If I was supposed to have a boyfriend, it may as well be him. I waited nervously until the end of class when the boys and girls separated for Gym. As he passed my desk, Kyle dropped the note into my lap. Then he shuffled out of the room, staring down at his shoes.

Quickly I snatched up the note and unfolded it. There, in my own handwriting, was the message I had written to Kyle:

*Kyle,
I like you. Do you like me? Do you
want to be my boyfriend? Circle
yes or no.*

He had circled yes. I guess that was a good thing. I had no idea what I would have done if he'd said no. It made me wonder, though. Did Kyle really *like* me? It was a weird thought. And now that we were boyfriend and girlfriend, what were we supposed to *do*?

* * *

I met Kyle by the soccer field after school, under our favorite tree where we always meet before we walk home together. We've been meeting there for ages, but this time something was different. I don't know, maybe it was love, but suddenly I didn't know what to say or what to do.

"Hey, Kyle," I said shyly.

"Hi, Amanda," Kyle replied. It was the first time I could ever remember him calling me Amanda, instead of just plain 'Manda. Kyle didn't seem to know how to act, either. He kept running his hands through his hair and kicking at the dirt with his sneakers. Neither of us said another word. We hardly even looked at each other.

Earlier, I had told Sabrina about me and Kyle being a "couple" now, and she had been full of advice.

"Guys are usually shy at first," she said knowingly. "You have to be the one to start talking. Compliment him on something."

I thought fast—maybe too fast. “Uh, nice shirt, Kyle,” I said. It really wasn’t all that great of a shirt. It was the shirt Kyle wears when all his other shirts are dirty and his mom hasn’t gotten around to doing the wash yet. It was the shirt with all the old tomato sauce stains on it, from that time we started a food fight in the cafeteria on Pizza Day.

“Sure,” said Kyle, looking down at his shirt. “I mean, uh, thanks Amanda.” He stuck his hands in his pockets and leaned up against the trunk of the tree. Then he slid down until he was sitting on the ground. I plopped down right next to him. For some reason, it suddenly felt strange being close to Kyle. It wasn’t like when I rode on the back of his bike and I had to hold onto his shoulders to keep from falling off. This was an uncomfortable kind of closeness. I scooted over several inches.

“So, what do we do now?” I asked.

“I dunno,” said Kyle with a shrug.

Usually after school, Kyle and I went exploring along the creek or played in the tree fort that we built in the woods. Now, those hardly seemed like the right things to do. Boyfriends and girlfriends weren’t supposed to climb trees or go hunting for salamanders.

“I guess we oughta hold hands or something,” Kyle spoke up.

I took a deep breath and nodded slowly. Couples did hold hands a lot.

Kyle reached his hand over like he wanted me to shake it or something. I took his hand and we held on lightly. I remembered one time, when Kyle and I were climbing a tall tree, how I slipped and almost fell. Kyle grabbed my hand and held on tight until I had gotten my feet back on the branch. That was nothing like this. Now even the feeling of his fingers wrapped loosely around my own made me feel strange.

Kyle’s hand started to sweat. So did mine, which was really weird. When I was teaching Kyle how to roller-skate, I’d had to hold his hand for even longer while we skated up and down the block. Sweat had run all down our faces, but I didn’t remember our *hands* getting this sweaty.

Finally Kyle slipped his hand out of mine, wiped it off, and started pulling up several long blades of grass. “I’m gonna make you a ring,” he explained as he began braiding the grass together. I think he was looking for an excuse to stop holding hands, which was perfectly fine with me. Besides, weren’t

boyfriends supposed to give their girls rings, as a symbol of their love?

So Kyle made me a ring out of grass. He held it out to me, but before I could take it, he pulled it back.

“Guess I oughta put it on you, like in the movies, right?” he said.

“Oh, yeah, right,” I agreed. I stuck out my hand, and he slipped the ring over my finger.

Stacy Graan-Wilson



It was scratchy and uncomfortable, but I smiled at Kyle and thanked him for it anyway. Then I stared down at my hands. I guess we both knew what was supposed to come next, but neither one of us wanted to mention it. Finally, after several minutes of silence, I gathered up my courage.

“I guess, then, all that’s left to do now is kiss.”

Kyle nodded. “Guess so.”

I took a deep breath and licked my lips. Kyle moved a little closer to me and ran his fingers through his hair. “How you wanna do this?” he asked. He looked scared to death. I used to think nothing scared Kyle.

“I don’t know,” I whispered. I couldn’t seem to make my voice any louder.

The only time Kyle and I had ever even come close to kissing was last Halloween when we each got a pair of those big red wax lips. We stuck them in our mouths and pretended to kiss with them. Even after that, we pulled away and said how gross it was. Now, here I was about to smush my real lips with my best friend’s. How nasty could you get? But there was no getting around it. If we were going to be boyfriend and girlfriend, we had to kiss.

Kyle leaned towards me. His eyes were closed. I closed my eyes, too. That’s what they always do in the movies. We moved closer, and ended up whacking our faces together.

“Ouch!” I pulled back.

“How ’bout we try that again?” said Kyle. “With our eyes open.” The sides of his mouth twitched, like he wanted to smile but wasn’t sure he should. I thought it was kind of funny, too, but I didn’t figure couples were supposed to laugh when they were trying to kiss, so I didn’t smile either. Instead, I kept my eyes open this time, and moved my face closer to Kyle’s.

It was kind of like when we used to play Tongue Chicken, this game Kyle invented where we’d stick out our tongues and move them closer together. Whoever chickened out first and stuck their tongue back in was the loser. I felt like we were playing Tongue Chicken now, as our lips kept on getting closer and closer. I wasn’t about to be the one to chicken out, but I really hoped Kyle would.

Suddenly, I saw something out of the corner of my eye, something moving in the grass. Hopping actually. “Hey, what was that?” I said. Eager for any excuse to get out of kissing, I pulled away from Kyle and jumped to my feet.

I heard Kyle let out his breath in a sigh of relief that sounded like a train engine pulling into a station. “What is it?” he asked. “Whadja see?”

“I think it’s a frog,” I replied, searching the tall grass.

“Wait, there it is!” Kyle yelled, pointing. “Man, it’s a whopper!” It was, too. It was the granddaddy of all bullfrogs, bigger than anything Kyle and I had ever seen in our lives.

Completely forgetting that we were boyfriend and girlfriend now, and that boyfriends and girlfriends were probably not supposed to be chasing frogs, I exclaimed eagerly, “Come on, Kyle, let’s catch it!”

We took off chasing after the frog. When it hopped, we hopped. When it zigged, we zagged. Kyle ran left. I ran right. We both ran into each other. But the frog somehow always managed to slip through our fingers.

“Where’d it go?” I panted when I’d lost sight of it.

“Over there in the ditch!” Kyle yelled. We sprinted towards it but, just when we got within pouncing distance, the bullfrog took one last leap and splashed into the ditch which was filled knee-high with muddy water.

Kyle and I weren’t about to let a prize like that get away. Muddy water had never stopped us before and it certainly wasn’t

I Like the World

I like the world
 The world is good to me
 And the world is a very
 Very good
 Very very good good place to be.
 It's a good place to be,
 This world that's good to me
 This good good world
 That's my place to be.
 And my world is a wish
 Like I wished it would be
 First I wished for a mom
 And she is good to me
 Then I wished for a morning
 And it was good to me
 And I wished for a song
 And it was good to me
 Should I wish for a bug or burger?
 For a boy or a pearl?
 For a sun or an apple?
 For a name or a world?
 I like the world
 The world is good to me
 And my world is a wish
 Like I wished it would be.

—Brittney Walker wrote this poem while participating in the after-school tutoring program at the First Church of the Brethren, Chicago, Illinois.

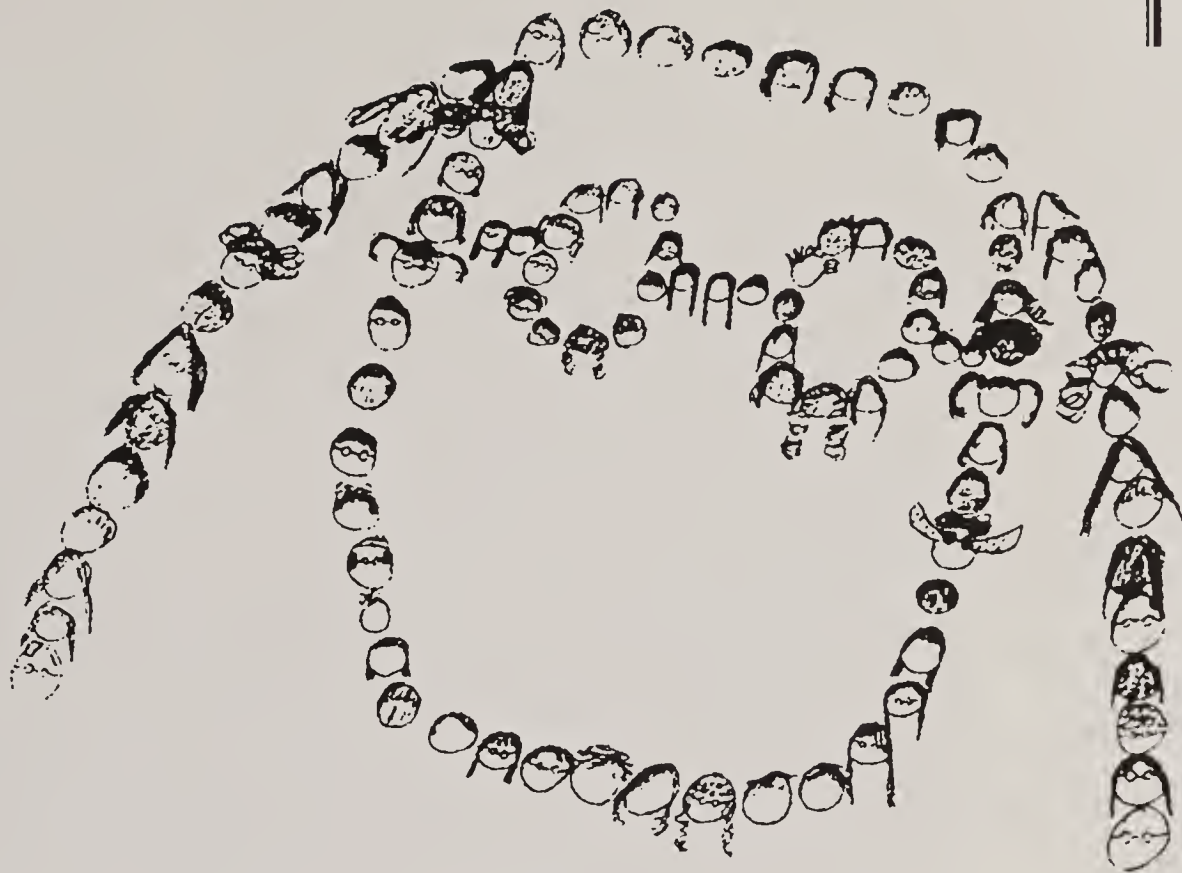


Illustration by
 Sarah Stowe, Grade 6
 University Elementary
 Bloomington, Indiana

going to now. Without a second thought—without even a first thought—we jumped into the ditch after the frog.

“I think we lost it,” said Kyle, after we’d splashed around in the water a bit.

“No, wait, there it is!” I hollered. “Right there, Kyle! It’s about to swim past you! Jump on it, Kyle, get it!”

Kyle jumped. He pounced on the frog and they both went under the water for a second. When Kyle emerged, he was soaked but triumphant.

“’Manda—I mean Amanda—I mean ’Manda, I got it!” he yelled excitedly, holding the not-so-excited-looking bullfrog high up in the air. “Check this guy out! Ain’t he huge?”

“I’ll say!” I agreed. I hurried over to Kyle and held out my hands. “Let me hold him.”

Kyle passed the frog over, and I held it like Kyle had taught me, around the middle just hard enough to keep him from getting away but not hard enough to hurt it. The frog

glared at us through big yellow eyes as if to say, “Okay, great, you’ve had your fun. Can I go now?”

I gave the frog back to Kyle, and he tossed it gently into the water. We watched as it swam away.

“Wow,” Kyle marveled. “I’ve never seen one so big, have you?”

“You’ve seen every frog I’ve ever caught,” I reminded him. “We’ve caught them all together.”

“True,” Kyle agreed. We were both silent for a moment, thinking. I wasn’t sure what he was thinking but it was probably the same thing I was thinking, and I was thinking that I liked Kyle a lot better as a boy who was my friend than as a boyfriend.

“Uh-oh,” I said suddenly. I glanced down at my hands.

“What is it?” Kyle asked.

“I lost the ring you gave me.”

“Oh.”

Kyle and I looked at each other. We didn’t

say anything, but we didn’t have to. Sometimes best friends can just read each other’s mind.

“So,” said Kyle. “You wanna go throw rotten tomatoes at Johnson’s nasty ol’ pit bull?”

“Sure,” I agreed. “Or we could put on our roller skates and have a high-speed water-gun fight.”

“Or we could build another level to our tree house.”

“Or we could dig for buried treasure.”

“We can do it all,” said Kyle. “We have the rest of the day.”

I nodded as we sloshed out of the ditch and headed home together. We had the rest of our lives.

Christina Dotson, Age 18,
 lives in North Fairfield,
 Ohio.



in 1933

I remember
the towering
summer tree,
I remember
the wooden steps
leading
to the screen door
of the kitchen

and I remember
the man
sitting on the lowest step,
I remember
my grandmother
appearing
on the landing,
taking two steps down,
then handing
the man a plate—
it was always the same:
two lightly
peppered eggs
with gold centers,
two strips
of crisp bacon,
American fries
and a cup of coffee

I would say, 'Hi,'
he would say, 'Hi,'
with meaningful reflection

a deep sorrow filled him,
he looked away,
I looked away—
on a back porch
in Northwest Indiana,
I watched
my first man
tremble
and then die

The Eye Among the Dishes

The salesman measured
my son's first shoes. . . I saw
my feet in an unemployment line
moving slowly as my hands
turn on this crusty dish.

Hurrying from the sink, I rush out
to the yard, synchronize my hands
with the child pulling weeds
from strawberries.

Always there is meditation
over the sink. Time is a crust
in a hungry week.
I'm falling into soil, sinking
into the boy's growing.

—Mark Taksa
Rodeo, California

Hot Stars

Adult stars
always do
what they do
up there
in lightness
and in dark.
You can depend
on that.

During day
Solar Mother
quietly draws
cerulean curtains
in front of them
so we can't see
what they're doing.

Being hot stars
it's understandable—
when we were kids
Mom and Dad locked
their door, too.

—E. D. Paul
Sauerlach, Germany

—Charles B. Tinkham
Gary, Indiana



THE SWEETEST BOUQUET

by Virginia A. Deweese

Jessica Lynn Dunswoody kicked the pop can and sent it flying. Her thoughts were as violent as her actions. She dreaded going home, but where else could an almost thirteen-year-old go? With her mother and dad gone to look after Grandma Ethel, who was very ill, it was lonely at the house. Oh, her Grandfather Sheaffer, her mother's father, was there "taking care of her." Hah! She may as well be by herself for all his concern!

All he thought about were the chores she should do when she got home from school. Like clean and do homework. Oh, and make supper for the two of them. TV was a "no-no." So was visiting any of her friends or even walking down the sidewalk in broad daylight.

Jessica had always been active, both physically and mentally. She had read nearly all week, but now was getting tired of that. Usually, she would do research for school or just get in touch with her friends through the Internet on the computer, but her grandfather didn't want her touching the "damned" thing. There wasn't much left to do in the house as she cleaned every afternoon at her grandfather's insistence. She wondered what he would come up with tonight to keep her busy.

It didn't take her long to find out. She'd hardly put one foot inside the front door when she heard his deep, rumbling voice call. "Jessica Lynn, that you?"

Under her breath, she muttered, "No, Grandfather, this is the friendly neighborhood slave." Louder, she said, "Yes, Grandfather, it's me." She certainly didn't want another lecture like all the others she'd gotten every day since her mother and dad had left.

"Good. I've got a little project for you. Something I think you will enjoy."

Jessica swallowed a sharp retort and mumbled, "Oh, what a surprise!"

"What did you say? I can't hear you."

"I just said good." Jessica laid her backpack on the couch and straightened her shoulders before turning towards the reclin-

er where her grandfather sat smoking a cigarette and staring at the TV. These two things were all he ever did—except, of course, planning "little" jobs for her. "What is it you want me to do?"

Grandfather put out his cigarette and looked her up and down. "You look like you're strong enough, all right, but I'm not sure you will know what to do."

Jessica was getting tired of the cat and mouse game the two of them played every day. "Well, what is it that you don't think I have the brains to do?"

"Now, don't get sassy with me, Jessica Lynn Dunswoody, or I'll have your behind with a switch like I used to get your mother's. She never was good for anything, either."

Jessica could only stare at her grandfather and wonder just what the problem was between him and his only child, Jessica's mother. Jessica figured her mom, Linda, was probably the best mother in the world—barring her friend Alicia Nelson's mother, who was pretty good, too. Grandfather was always putting her mom down, and she was getting plenty tired of it.

"Why do you say things like that about Mom?" Jessica asked. "She's a good mother, and she works, too. Hard. Every day to help Dad out."

Grandfather Sheaffer lit another cigarette and blew smoke Jessica's way. "Don't get smart with me, girl. That's all your mother ever did. Then she ran off to college and never had time for her family any more."

Now, Jessica was truly incensed. She knew the real story behind that because her mother had told her. "Well, you didn't want her to go to college even though she had a scholarship for one close to home. Instead, you told her that if she went to college, she had to leave home. So, she left town and paid her own way by working two jobs. And that's where she met Dad and they fell in love."

"Fell in love! Hah! Those two birdbrains don't know a thing about love or commitment. Not like me and my Mary. Now, there was a *woman*. Too bad your mom couldn't

have been more like her." Her grandfather lowered his head and closed his eyes for a moment. When he spoke about her Grandmother Mary, there was always a tremble in his voice as though he still missed her very much. But it made Jessica mad to hear him belittle her own mother.

She flopped onto the couch. "I loved Grandmother Mary. She was always nice to Mom and Dad and me. And she is the one who told Mom to go on to college, and then helped her whenever she could."

"Where in hell did you hear that story?" her grandfather demanded.

"From my mother, and she would never lie to me!"

"Like hell she wouldn't."

Jessica had had it. No more discussions with this pig-headed, rude, "babysitter." Sitting up straight, she announced, "Then, Grandfather, since I'm just like my mother, I'm not going to do your little project tonight! I'm going to my room." Jessica grabbed her backpack and headed up the stairs while her grandfather yelled up for her to get herself right back downstairs. She ignored him because she knew he would never climb the stairs. He had tried only once, and she had thought he would have a heart attack when he was only half way up. That's when her mother and father had given him a half-bed in the den on the first floor for his visit.

Reaching her bedroom, Jessica slammed the door on her still-yelling grandfather. Though temporarily safe, she knew she had done it this time. Her parents would have plenty to say to her about being a smarty-pants. But enough was enough! She missed Mom and Dad so much, and, heck, all the old man could do was talk about how lousy they were. She'd had it with him!

Jessica laid down on her bed. Grabbing a brown, furry teddy bear that Dad had bought her for her tenth birthday, she cried until, exhausted, she fell into a deep sleep.



photo by Della Stone

Later, she heard the phone ring. Probably her parents. However, she refused to answer it and didn't care if her grandfather had. Eventually, she got up and changed into her PJs. Returning to bed, she decided that tomorrow wasn't something she was looking forward to.

The next day, Jessica figured that her grandfather would be in fine form when she got home. That morning, she had found him sleeping in the recliner, the TV blaring, and cigarette butts scattered everywhere. She'd picked those up and carried them to the trash can outside. Then she'd sprayed the whole room. Finally, she'd left for school with her grandfather still sleeping soundly. It wasn't her place to tell him that he'd probably feel much better if he'd sleep in the half-bed. Maybe if he would, he wouldn't hurt so much in the mornings.

Gingerly, Jessica eased the front door open and stepped inside. There was no noise from the living room except the TV. No voice demanded to know if it were she. Then the smell of smoke hit her like it did every afternoon when she got home. Grandfather and his cigarettes! How glad she was that neither of her parents smoked. Ugh! What a horrible habit!

When she entered the living room, she found her grandfather sleeping. In fact, if it hadn't been for the smoke lingering in the air, she would have thought that he had been

sleeping all day.

She put her backpack carefully on the bottom step of the staircase in case her grandfather awoke and she needed to make a quick escape. Then she went to the kitchen to fix herself a sandwich. After she had eaten, she washed her dishes and straightened up.

It was funny, how she could still smell smoke so strongly! Maybe her grandfather had awakened and was smoking another cigarette. But, when she got back to the living room, she found him still lying in the chair exactly as he had been when she first got home.

However, tendrils of smoke seemed to be rising from the recliner.

"Grandfather," Jessica said loudly. "Wake up. I need to look at the chair."

She got a mumble and a cough for an answer. She shook him and said even louder, "Wake up, Grandfather. I think your chair's on fire. Get up now."

Groggily, he sat up and looked around. "What did you say?"

"I said there's smoke coming from your chair. Get up."

"Where?"

"Right there!" Jessica pointed to the smoke drifting from the chair.

When he finally saw the smoke, her grandfather got up so fast he nearly fell over. Jessica grabbed his arm to steady him. Seeing that he had gained his balance, she

pushed the recliner towards the door.

"What the hell are you doing, girl?" he demanded.

"I'm pushing the chair outside! Do you want the house to burn down?" Jessica pushed even harder until the chair finally rested near the door. Snatching it open, she secured the storm door to its widest position. But now, she was having trouble pulling the recliner over the door frame. Grandfather finally helped by pushing from behind.

It was a struggle. But finally they got the chair onto the sidewalk, away from the front porch. Jessica then ran around the side of the house, grabbed the water hose, and dragged it to the front yard. She wet down the chair, hoping that the thin stream of water would put out the smoldering fire. For several minutes, she watched the smoke as it changed color. Finally it stopped. Only then did she look up. Her grandfather was gazing down at her with a funny look on his face.

Oh oh, she thought—here it comes. I just know he'll have something nasty to say like, "Well, you sure made a mess of my chair, girl!"

But he didn't. At least, he didn't voice it. He just turned and made his way back inside the house where he quietly sat down on the couch.

"Are you all right, Grandfather?"

He didn't answer her immediately, but then he raised his head and said, "Yes. I'm fine."

"Good," Jessica said. "I'm glad." And she was glad. She might not get along with him, but he was still her grandfather and she wouldn't want anything to happen to him.

Unexpectedly, he asked, "What are you going to do with the chair?"

Jessica considered for a moment. "We'll leave it on the sidewalk for tonight, and then tomorrow afternoon when I get home from school I'll drag it around to the alley so the garbage men can pick it up."

Grandfather Sheaffer nodded his head, leaned back, and closed his eyes.

* * *

Jessica hesitated when she got to the sidewalk leading up to her home. The recliner had been removed. Now, what's going on? she asked herself.

Remembering the last two days, Jessica paused before going inside. She was really tired of fighting with her grandfather, but she didn't know what else to do. She couldn't stay in her room every minute of every day, and she certainly couldn't ignore him completely. After all, he was an old man and someone should see that he was okay once in a while. But she sure didn't want to be the only one who had to handle that job. Arrrgh! When did Mom and Dad say they were returning? She entered the house uneasily.

"Is that you, Jessica?" came the deep, rumbling voice from the living room.

"Yes, Grandfather, it's me." Jessica automatically replied. She felt as though she were following a script. I wonder what he's got planned for me today.

Jessica laid her backpack on the couch and turned to see that her grandfather was sitting in a straight-back chair in front of the TV. However, the TV wasn't on and he wasn't smoking. Jessica wondered if perhaps this was her grandfather's clone, instead of the real man. Glancing around, she noticed that he had cleaned up—both himself and the house. At least the living room looked as though it had been cleaned. It smelled good, too. Not smoky for once!

Curious to find out what chore he had for her, Jessica said, "Well, what do you want me to do this afternoon, Grandfather?"

"Well, first of all, Jessica," he began and then paused. Oh no, here it comes, Jessica told herself. "I want you to come to the kitchen and have supper and then I have a surprise for you in the back yard."

"A surprise for me?" An axe to chop down the proverbial cherry tree perhaps, she said to herself, though her sarcasm wasn't comforting.

"Yep. A surprise and you can see it right after dinner."

"Sure, sounds good to me."

"You don't sound very enthusiastic," he said, looking at her inquiringly.

"Oh, well, I'm just tired. A long day at school. You know how it is, right?" Jessica said flippantly.

"Actually, no, I don't," her grandfather said, making her jerk her head up in surprise. "I didn't finish school. Did make it through the eighth grade, but I was needed on the farm. So I farmed instead of finished my schooling. So many boys at that time and in those circumstances did the same thing."

Jessica looked at him earnestly. "I never knew that. Why didn't someone tell me?"

"Because I didn't want you to know. I asked your mother never to tell you. You see, I was more than a little embarrassed by how smart you and your mother are."

"But, Grandfather, you worked your whole life and you had a good farm. I know because Mom told me that you and Grandmother made a pretty good living there."

"We did," he agreed, "but I was still embarrassed. Maybe I shouldn't have been. But, well, I was. Now, I wish you had known. Only I'm a stubborn old cuss. Or haven't you noticed that?"

Jessica looked at her grandfather gravely. "It's okay," she replied. "I think you're super smart. I never could make things grow like you do."

"Well, you'll just have to learn, won't you?"

"How?"



photo courtesy of Skylark



"Leave it till after supper, and then we'll see what can be done, okay?"

Jessica's smile lit up her whole face. "Sure, Grandfather, anything you say!"

"But first I have to ask you something, Jessica Lynn."

"Sure," she said after a slight pause.

"You see, I heard you on the phone with your mother and dad last night. You never said a thing about the chair." He hesitated as if wanting to say more, but Jessica knew what he was really asking.

"Well, Mom asked if there was anything wrong, and I just told her that there was nothing you and I couldn't handle." Jessica continued, "She and Dad have enough going on right now taking care of Grandma Ethel. Besides, I figured you'd want to tell them yourself."

Grandfather Sheaffer laid his calloused hand on Jessica's shoulder and squeezed. If Jessica hadn't known better, she would almost have sworn there were tears in her grandfather's eyes. But the next second he was laughing. "You are really something, Granddaughter. Really something."

"Thanks, Grandfather, but can we eat now? I'm hungry."

"Sure thing, Jessie. And this is our 'communication' supper."

"Communication supper? What's that?" Jessica was puzzled. "Sounds like church."

Grandfather gave her a wink and said, "We're going to learn to communicate with each other. Don't you think it's about time?"

As Jessica turned toward the kitchen to set the table, she said over her shoulder, "Sounds like a deal to me!"

Grandfather had been right—it was a communication supper. The two of them talked all through the meal and the cleanup afterwards, learning about each other and about themselves.

Jessica came away from the kitchen smiling. She was happy that her grandfather wanted to make amends for all their previous quarrels. They seemed to be heading in a new direction. One that would bring them closer together.

"Jessica, I'm going outside and have a cigarette. I know you don't like them, but I can't give them up. Guess I'm just too old." He looked at her as though begging her to understand. "But I do promise to only smoke

in the yard."

Jessica knew he was being serious now, and that he always kept his promises. "That's fine, Grandfather. I don't want you to get hurt, that's all."

Slowly, he smiled at her before going out the door.

* * *

As dusk settled into the corners of the back yard, Jessica found herself wrist deep in dirt. Earlier, while she had been at school, Grandfather Sheaffer had located the nearest nursery and bought bulbs and flats of bedding plants. He'd told her that, if nothing else, he could teach her how to plant and nurture flowers. He proceeded to do just that.

Carrots

Grow beneath the ground,
In the midst of dirt and worms.
Grow silently with no objections.
All that is seen,
A green and coarse top.
Yanked from its resting place.
Discovered to be a bright orange.
Not expected.

—*Therese Loiacono, Age 18*
Wheeling High School
Wheeling, Illinois

For several days, Jessica and her grandfather spent many enjoyable hours in the back yard. He explained the cycles of growing, what plants were best for blooming in the different seasons, and how to vary the heights and colors of the flowers to improve the appearance of the yard. His expertise went far beyond growing vegetables and cotton. Jessica drank in all that he taught her like a thirsty puppy lapping up a bowl of water.

"Jessica," Grandfather asked as he took another marigold out of its plastic cup, "did you know that the marigold's smell repels insects?"

"You're kidding, right?"

"All you have to do is smell the flower and see for yourself."

Jessica gently picked up one of the marigolds and sniffed. "Whew, that smells horrible! No wonder the bugs won't bother them." Jessica rubbed her nose and smiled at her grandfather.

Suddenly, she blurted out, "I know, Grandfather, why don't you open a nursery?" She wasn't sure if her comment surprised her grandfather or herself more.

"Naw, I'm not smart enough for that," he replied.

"Oh, yes, you are! If you can teach me, you can teach anyone."

Her grandfather simply smiled as he worked the soil around the root of the plant.

"Just think about it, okay?" Jessica could tell that he would need a little convincing, and she would have to keep her arguments up to convince him that it was a good idea.

"We'll see," was all her grandfather would say. That was good enough for Jessica. She figured no one was ever too young or too old to learn.

Later, at bedtime, Jessica sleepily closed her eyes and said her prayers. She then hollered down, "Goodnight, Grandfather, I'll see you in the morning."

"Night, honey. Sleep tight and don't let the bedbugs bite."

Jessica giggled and snuggled down into the bed. She smiled as she remembered the day the two of them had spent together. While planting the last of the annuals that would flower all summer, Grandfather had said, "Jessica, your Grandmother once told me something that I hadn't thought about in years and didn't really understand at the time."

"What's that?"

"She said, 'Love is like flower seeds. They should be spread around to make the sweetest bouquet.'" He smiled softly as he handed her an iris bulb and showed her how to plant it with the root side down so it would come up year after year. "Your grandmother was always a smart woman."

Jessica began to drift off to sleep and then a thought popped into her head, full bloom. "Grandfather," she yelled down the stairs.

"Yes, dear," he answered.

"We're going to have the 'sweetest bouquet' in the whole world."

*Virginia A. Deweese lives
in Hammond, Indiana.*



CENTRAL AVENUE: THE BEST OF TIMES

by Patricia Wilson

Looking back at the days, months, and years spent on the sixteen-hundred block of Central Avenue in Whiting, Indiana, has brought back memories of a time past that can never exist again, except in my thoughts and in my heart. I spent the first eight years there, with my parents and my brother, Frank. My sister, Carol Ann, lived there, too. But she was only six months old when the family moved to Lincoln Avenue.

The years spent on Central Avenue were times of good fun and friendship. Frank, my brother, was six years older than I was, but I still managed to tag along on some of his adventures. One I remember especially is the day I ventured across the Pennsylvania railroad tracks at the end of the block. (I should pause here to state that my brother took me across. I was not allowed to cross the tracks by myself.) The fascination of this excursion was to see the fort that Frank and his buddies, Carl and Jack Herakovich, Jimmy Kaine, Bobby Sharp, and Jimmy Kinane, had built of tarpaper, wood pieces and whatever else that had been handy. Needless to say, it was a work of art to them. But now that I think of it, even the smallest bit of wind would have caused havoc to the structure. However, to them it was the greatest creation that had ever been built. Although Frank was reluctant to grant me my wish to see this great edifice, I must say he was a gracious host. He and his friends even invited me to share their lunch.

I was given the task of finding twigs and scraps of paper in the area, while the boys dug a hole to start the fire for cooking. The menu consisted of potatoes, more potatoes, and marshmallows. Not very nutritious by any standard, but the meal was scrumptious. The boys wrapped the potatoes in foil (commandeered from their respective homes) and then they buried the potatoes amongst the coals and twigs. (Oh! I forgot to mention that one other task, and a very important one, was to find chunks of coal that had fallen from the passing steam-engine trains.) After what seemed like forever, the meal

was ready. Jack and Jimmy had brought some margarine, salt and pepper.

When I looked at the potato that was my share, I wondered how any of us could ever consider eating such a disgusting mass of black. Then Bobby showed me just how great the mass was when he split mine in half, and the whitest white appeared in contrast to the blackened outside. After we had satiated ourselves with this delicious and unusual culinary delight, sticks that had their ends cleaned and shaved to a point were routed out of the shack (oops! I mean, fort). On these, we roasted marshmallow after marshmallow. Now as I recall this event, I can't help wondering how it was that, when these friends completed these actions subsequently, they never invited me to join them again. Despite the sticky fingers, smoky-soaked clothes, dirty hands and face, I will never forget this experience.

Time has a way of passing and children enter new phases in their lives. I will never forget the times I played dolls on my back porch with Phyllis and Margie Peters, Judy Kamradt, and Diane Skrundrich. I remember this interlude as a time of innocence, a time of growing, a time of laughter and tears, and a time of families being together. Central Avenue was a quiet place and a safe place in which to live and grow. (I should footnote this statement by saying that the street wasn't always quiet, especially when the boys and girls congregated around the streetlight in the middle of the block and later played tag on warm spring and summer nights.) The joy of playing "Kick the Can" up and down the street was another of the numerous feelings the children enjoyed. Of course, sometimes we would just sit and talk and possibly dream of more adventures that we could share in the upcoming days. Another place that was a center of activity was the front steps of my house at 1615. Phyllis, Judy, Diane, and I would spend many hours playing a variety of stair games. For some reason, the kids gravitated to my house.

Another memory I recall is when my mom would send me to the grocery store owned

by Mr. and Mrs. Brozovich. (I never found out what Mr. and Mrs. Brozovichs' first names were until they passed on years later.) I would walk, skip, or run my way down the street with money tied in a clean handkerchief that I had put in my dress pocket or held tightly in my hand. The grocery store was a small place, but it was extremely handy if neighbors needed milk, bread, fresh-cut meat, or fresh fruit and vegetables. Another amenity this store offered was that the owners kept a running tab for each customer that could be reduced as cash became available.

Oh! There is no way I can forget the Brozovichs' wonderful mouth-watering array of penny candies that were for sale in the wooden and glass cases. Everything that tantalized the senses was available: Mary Janes, in their red and yellow wrappers; bullseyes; dots of blue, pink, yellow, and green on long strips of white paper; gumdrops and so much, much more. It's a wonder that more stomach aches didn't occur after a trip to the candy counter at Brozovichs'.

To me, Central Avenue is still a piece of Americana because, even though it has been over fifty years since I lived there, just its name brings back distinct memories of my brother and his friends, my parents, and my aunt and uncle and cousins, besides all the girls I grew up with (Diane, Judy, Phyllis, Jeannine, Betty, and Margie). Even now, when I drive down this old street, I can still feel the emotions and I can still hear the laughter and wonderful sounds that emanate from long ago. Central Avenue in Whiting, Indiana, is not just a street. It is where I was loved and made to feel a part of so many other lives. This essence of place, which still moves me, makes all the good and bad times I spent there hard to forget.

*Patricia Wilson lives
in Hammond, Indiana.*



North Lawndale In August

*... yet another statistic in a grisly
season of violence, another victim in
an endless, numbing stream. . .*

—Chicago Tribune

At Douglas and Albany
children jump rope double-dutch,
grandchildren of the ones I used to watch,
kids who jumped right in,
whose bold eyes and quick feet
kept them moving freely,
cleared their minds of fear.

The double-jump was hard for me,
the ropes a barrier.
I'd rollerskate instead through Douglas Park,
on pebble-flecked concrete
that criss-crossed the grass.

Here I could forget about the words
that Daddy gave emotion to
without defining them,
like "cancer" and "Nazis,"
about the chill he said I'd get from popsicles,
the stray dogs I shouldn't pet,
the polio-infested water I shouldn't swim in.
I could forget my bad dreams
about an iron lung or a leg brace,
or a barking dog running at my heels,
rabies frothing its muzzle.

Sometimes I'd fall on the broken pavement,
then run home, crying,
where Mother would cleanse my bloodied knees
with burning iodine and soothing hands.
Sometimes the gravel wouldn't come out,
and I'd wonder how much damage
little stones could cause in a body.

—Sandra Goldsmith
Chicago, Illinois

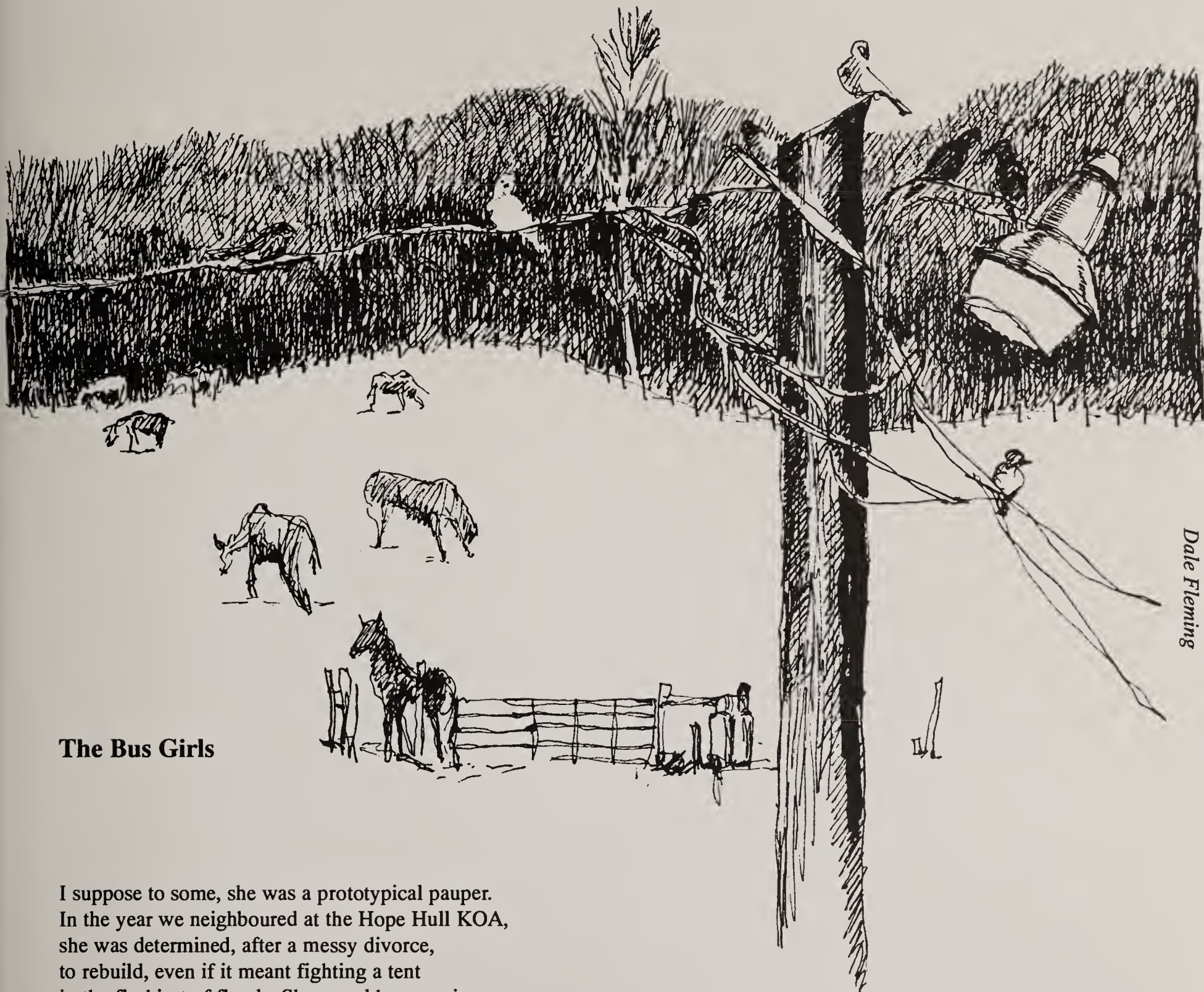
For My Father

*My sorrow is so wide
I cannot see across it;*

—Kenneth Rexroth

For twenty years you were with us, you are gone now,
another twenty years under the weeping willows
you lie bereft and cold in the dark wind.
Each day you returned home late from work,
I could see beads of sweat over your honest police uniform.
You loved us as the tree loves its root.
I am your cotyledon now going greener through your sap.
If I could only repay your debts,
nothing would be enough but love
that I had for you and still do.
You left so unexpectedly early,
your house could fall but for our mother
who took over after you and pulled us through.
That is your story. You died for our ambition.
But the dead are at last free,
it is the living that suffer.
Neither tears nor anguish can lessen the loss of you.
Father, if sorrows were immutable,
I could mourn for your sudden collapse
without disturbing the peace in the earthly,
the quiet, and the dispassionate,
for my griefs are as thick as the new moon,
measured in nautical miles,
and long as the transatlantic flights.
Dear father, my genesis,
Apollo and Crazy Horse of my childhood and youth,
another season is here; it is all winter and grass.

—Rabiul Hasan
Baton Rouge, Louisiana



Dale Fleming

The Bus Girls

I suppose to some, she was a prototypical pauper. In the year we neighbored at the Hope Hull KOA, she was determined, after a messy divorce, to rebuild, even if it meant fighting a tent in the flashiest of floods. She saved her pennies from recycled cans and unwanted newspapers of traveling transients. Even her three girls sold crafts and lemonade, camper to camper, till they purchased a used, yellow school bus.

Some said, "Big deal. Poverty is still poverty." In the weeks that followed, they removed most of those squalid seats. They erected partitions for privacy. Yellow was replaced by brown with red trim. Even windows were clean and draped. To this day, I cannot separate their bus from a Winnebago. After all, they had their roof and equity. The next time Someone puts alternate housing candidates down, remember the Bus Girls.

—Mike Catalano
Santa Cruz, California

Baby Day

I smell your milky smell on hands that reach to touch whatever's near: my face, your toes of equal worth to you. You study each with eyes of midnight blue while I choose clothes for you to wear today. Your laugh's a spray of stars to fill this sky of mine. You sit erect, consuming in small bites, one day. I think of fears I never dared admit, that in this world my child would come to harm, a fear that's doubled now I see my son caught up with you, child, pink with charm, a sunny girl in summer sweetly sprung. Let's slide these Gerber pears onto your tongue: a peary smile from you is my moon hung.

—Joyce Brown
Baltimore, Maryland

Young

Illustration by Isaiah Stroup, Grade 6
University Elementary, Bloomington, Indiana



Shirley Jo Moritz

Editor

Writers

White

White tastes like vanilla ice cream and Oreos
With white cream in the middle.
White looks like the clouds in the sky.
White smells like daisies, tulips, and roses.
White sounds like pigeons in the sky.

—Robert Clayton, Age 10
J.W. Riley Elementary
Hammond, Indiana

Red

Red can be a car, cardinal too.
Red can be flowers, books, and balloons.
Red is a color just like blue.
Red can be blood, shirts, and hearts too.
Red can be leaves in the fall.
Red can be apples in the spring.
Red is a better color than blue.

—Tim O'Neil, Age 10
J.W. Riley Elementary
Hammond, Indiana

What is Green?

Green smells like the fresh green grass after it is cut.
Green smells like the candles that are around the house.
Green smells like the air fresheners that hang in cars.
Green looks like the lizards that crawl around.
Green looks like the shamrocks that grow in the ground.
Green is the taste of lime Jello in a bowl.
Green is the taste of the sour Warheads.
Green is the sound of the frogs at night.
Green is the sound of the grasshoppers
That make music at night.
All of these are the great color GREEN!

—Sarah Pitts, Age 9
J.W. Riley Elementary
Hammond, Indiana

What is Orange?

Orange is the taste of juice,
That is good, sweet and yummy.
Orange is the look of an orange and a pumpkin.
Orange is the smell of flowers in the summer.
Orange is the sound of an oriole bird
That is chirping in the summer.

—Krystyn Anderson, Age 10
J.W. Riley Elementary
Hammond, Indiana

Yellow

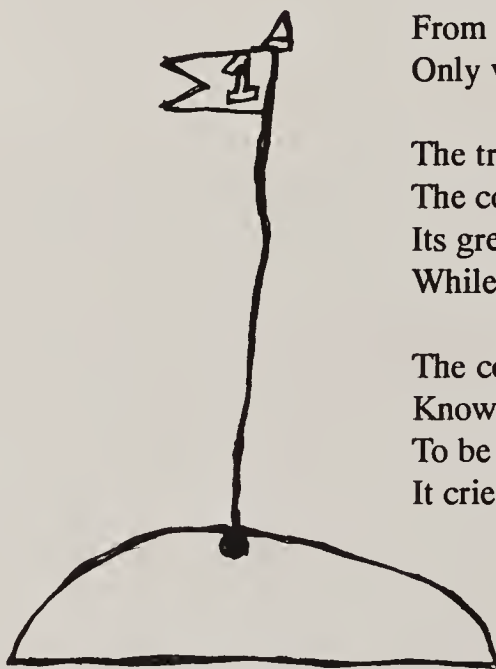
Yellow is the smell of a perfect lemon.
Yellow smells like vanilla pudding.
Yellow is the taste of a sour lemon.
Yellow is the taste of vanilla pudding.
Yellow looks like the bright sun
Shining in my eyes.
Yellow is the sound of a yellow bus
Driving by.

—Tanya Culver, Age 10
J.W. Riley Elementary
Hammond, Indiana

Kiss

I want a kiss.
 I don't mean a light, butterfly touch,
 or a harsh graze on my cheek.
 I want a kiss that will find and
 awaken the me who's been
 locked away for quite some time now.
 I never was given a *true* kiss.
 Such a gift was never bestowed upon me.
 Perhaps I wasn't worthy of having the
 fibers of my skin
 dance and travel
 from my tingling lips
 in small but constant spurts
 of electricity,
 flow into my cheeks,
 light them up into two glowing
 flowers of energy.
 All my kisses have been forced;
 expected actions performed by an
 unwilling actress.
 I look around me and my gaze falls upon
 the one who should be
 blessing me
 with his soft lips now,
 who should be presenting me
 with his gifts and
 gaining mine in return.
 But maybe he's over-kissed,
 and is tired of the joy I now want.
 Or maybe he's under-kissed,
 and fears the joy that will
 shock the follicles of his hair.
 I will get my kiss somehow.
 I want the sensation,
 the making of the pact
 that two malleable lips seal.
 I want the experience
 to reminisce upon after all
 the electricity leaves my body.
 I want the memory of his taste
 on my lips,
 so I can slowly lick
 their redness
 and relive my kiss
 all over again.

—Meredith Kaffel, Age 15
 Short Hills, New Jersey



The Golf Course

In early spring the course comes alive,
 Inviting people to visit when they leave work at 5,
 Asking even the dedicated to play hooky that day,
 In the hopes of enticing its friends to come play.

The greens and the fairways call out to all ages,
 Charming players as they go through their stages,
 From the 1st to 18th, the course gives so much pleasure,
 Only wild balls and sand traps are not quite a treasure.

The trees seem to whisper,
 The course seems to breathe,
 Its green color and calmness can give peace of mind,
 While crazing and frustrating all at the same time.

The course becomes sad as cold weather grows near,
 Knowing it has to face its biggest fear,
 To be closed and cooped up until the next season,
 It cries but understands—it's for a good reason.

—Daniel Klamm, Age 12
 West Genesee Middle School
 Syracuse, New York

Old Woman

Look at me, what do you see?
 A wrinkled face, a shriveled body,
 One side of me limp from a stroke,
 A mind that finds it difficult to be
 In touch with my own destiny.

Indeed this was not meant to be,
 For I was a mother, a grandmother,
 A teacher for decades of three.
 So look again at me
 And tell me what you see.

I have touched many hearts and minds,
 So look beyond these tired eyes,
 Past this mouth that cannot vocalize
 And see what you can truly find,
 A woman strong and wise.

—Pat Connolly
 attends high school
 Arlington Heights, Illinois

*Illustrations on both pages
 by Alan Crague, Age 9
 Merrillville, Indiana*





A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A CARROT

by Heather Burton



One day, perfect, beautiful, little ol' me was sittin' in the garden mindin' my own business, when some large, barbaric creature grabbed my green, soft, gorgeous hair and started yankin'.

"Help, help!" I screamed in my charmin', southern-belle drawl. "Ow! Ow! Stop it!!!"

Suddenly, I was ripped from my cozy dwellin' place in our lovely Mother Earth. Luminous sunlight blinded my dazzlin', warm, brown eyes. My glorious, copper-tone skin was frigidly frosty in the icy September air. I was no longer standin' on my elegant root. I was danglin' by my luscious, green hair.

"Stop, stop! Let me down! Help me! I'm bein' carrot-napped by some barbaric creature. HELP!!!" By this time, I was gettin' hysterical and beginin' to swoon. "Where are we goin'? Cabbage, Broccoli, Radish, help me! It's me, Tops. I'm bein' carrot-napped!!! Are you listenin' to me? Quick, dial 991 or is it 911 or"

The barbarian proceeded to take me farther and farther away from my blessed sanctuary. Glancin' away from it, I noticed a large building with two doors and tons of windows. "Marvelous darlin'," I thought, "enough light that I can bathe my luscious skin. Maybe this isn't goin' to be so bad after all."

When we finally reached the house, I was

very relieved. My head hurt somethin' awful from my hair bein' pulled and bein' yanked around.

First thing the barbaric creature did was run me under arctic water. "What are you doin'?" I sputtered, tryin' not to choke. Finally, it took me out of the water and dried me off with a rough, wonderful towel.

Thinkin' the worst was all over with, the glint of sunlight off metal caught my eye. "What in the world," I whispered, "is that?" All of the sudden, it was runnin' that thing from my head to my root.

"Halt! That tickles!" I squealed. I thought it was just shinin' me up, but then I noticed my beautiful, orange skin was no longer on me. It was on the cupboard underneath me.

"Yeow! What have you done? You nasty big ol'...ol'...beet!" The worst part of what it did to me came next. It...it...cut off all my wonderful hair! Oh, the pain!!! The sorrow!!! It was then that I realized that this creature was jealous of my bright orange slender body and elegant green hair.

I felt that I would never live the good life again. It then proceeded to take one bite of my root, say something about bein' bitter, and throw me into the tall, itchy weeds behind its dwellin' place.

"And that's how I've come to live with

ya'll. Although I'm no longer beautiful, I'm still the same carrot. I'm brown with a touch of green, but still as sweet as ever and I'm not dead! I've heard horror stories from peelin's about veggies that go into that dwellin' and never come out!!!

Heather Burton, Age 17,
lives in New Richmond, Wisconsin.



Why

I never walked or knew the world
 They took away my sight
 Clear eyes glowing only to know
 They'll never see the light
 A seed then embryo I was
 Till you snatched away my breath
 Judged unfairly is how I feel
 Confined to a life of death
 You knew the power that you held
 Now you think back and cry
 My only question that I ask
 Is, "Can you tell me why?"

—Chantay Rogers, Age 17
 Wheeling High School
 Wheeling, Illinois

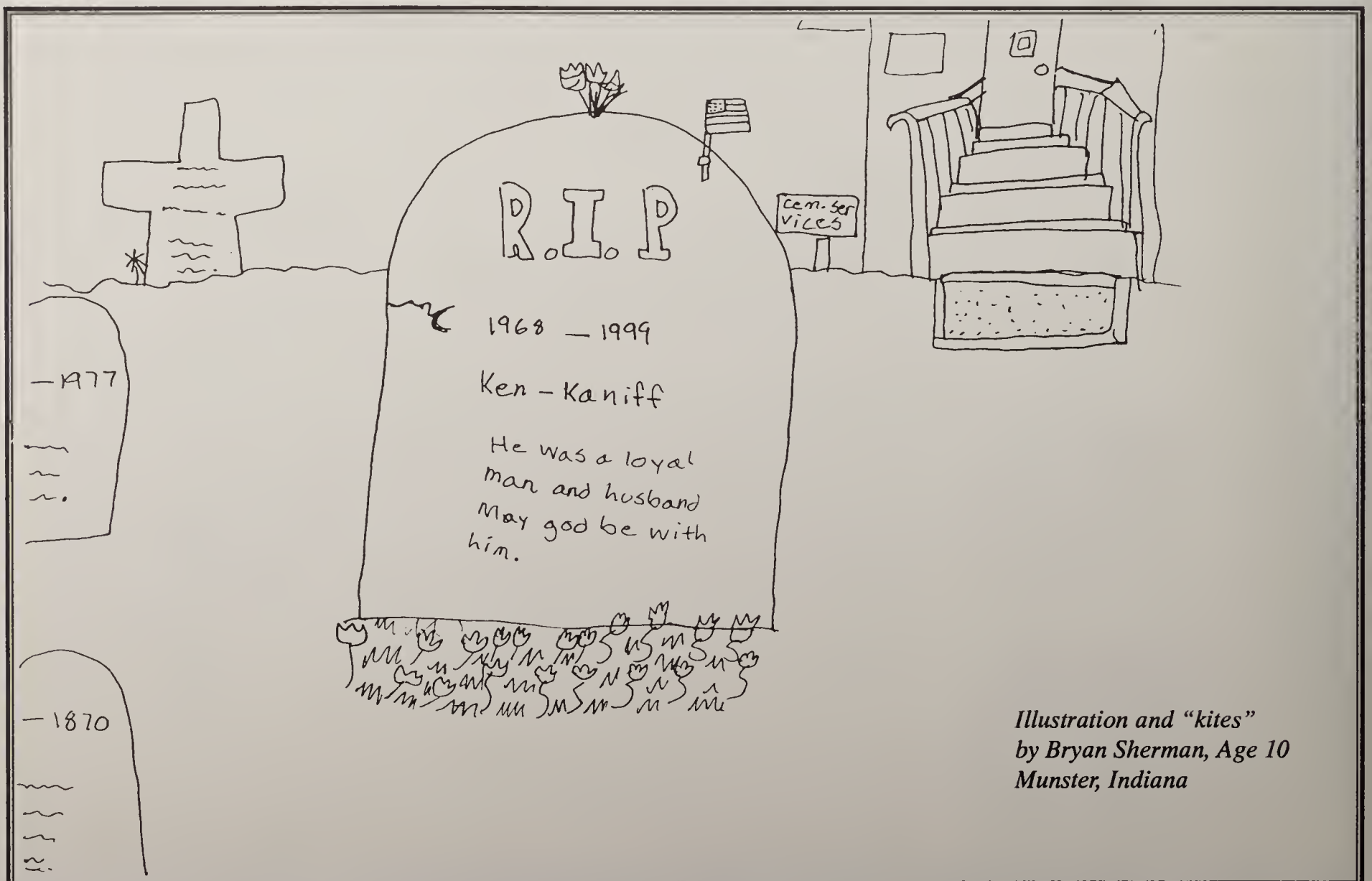
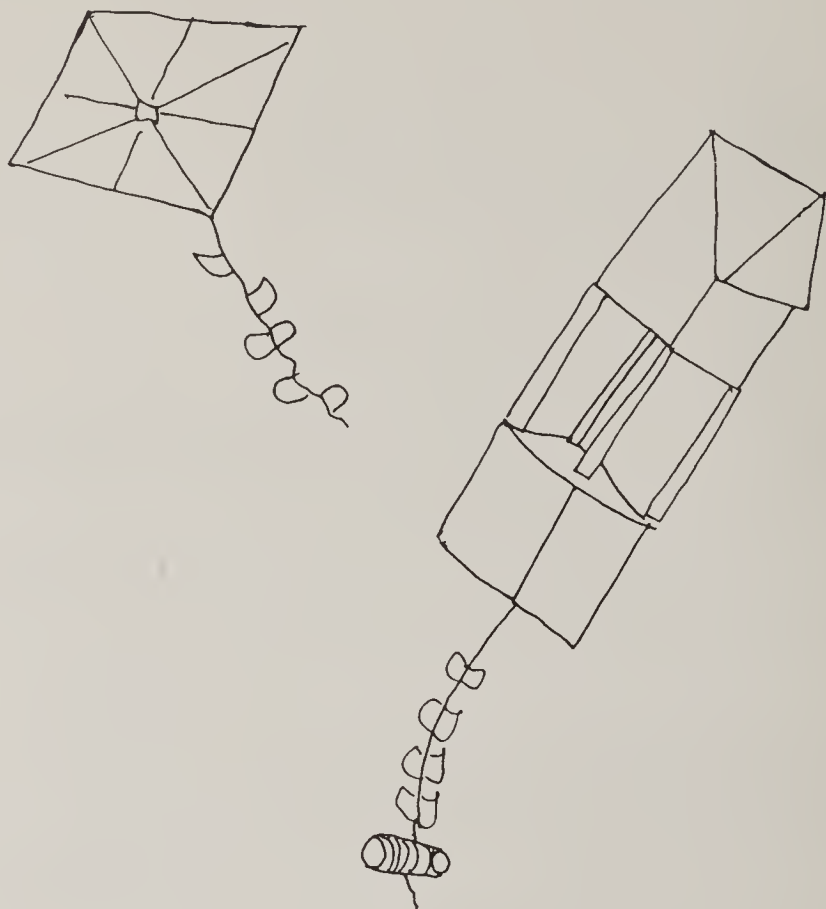


Illustration and "kites"
 by Bryan Sherman, Age 10
 Munster, Indiana

Talking to a Stone

"Hey, kid."

I feel as if I should
tell you something
truly important,
something to take you
peacefully away to your destination,
as easily as the wind
took the soft fuzzes of the
dandelion when you blew on it in July.
I feel as if I should
give you some piece of wisdom
to take your sweet little self
to the other side.
But all I can think of
are silly things,
single times that I still had you
to hold and to scold,
still had you as mine.

"So, kid."

Remember when you got
the chicken pox in second grade,
and you screamed when I
tried to put salve on?
Remember how happy you were
after I did,
and how much fun we had
playing connect-the-dots?
I do.
I remember a lot of things.
Like the time you first ate a
strawberry at Grandma's house
and the red juice dribbled down
the cleft in your chin
and trickled in
tiny, glistening, ruby rivers onto
the bright sailor shirt
Grandpa gave you just minutes before.
We all laughed at that one,
didn't we?

Oh! And I almost forgot the time
David, or Daddy, as you called him,
(Did I tell you how much he misses that word?)
swooped down and grabbed you
by your strong legs
(Oh, you would have been such a great
athlete someday)
and placed you so carefully on his shoulders.
You peered down over his
reddish-brown hair
and I remember the smile
on your face
as you saw how we grown-ups
(You liked to tease us and say you were
a grown-down)
could see.
You said you loved being up high.
You could have made some pilot.
I hope you're flying now, kid.

I'm sitting here,
amidst the grass we just
carefully cut
and the newly-planted flowers
and the pussy willow you adored.
I'm sitting here,
next to where you're said to be,
at least according to that rock
that bears your name.
Yet I know that you aren't there.
I know you're out flying somewhere,
playing connect-the-dots
while eating a fresh strawberry
and getting the juice
on a big tuft of cloud.
I can see your shape
in the sky
when I tilt my head up.
You're waving to me.
And I'm waving back.
"Hey, kid."

—Meredith Kaffel, Age 15
Short Hills, New Jersey

"Raincat" by Christopher Silverman, Age 18
Simsbury, Connecticut



Breeze

The breeze goes wherever it pleases.
The breeze gets to smell the roses
of distant lands.
The breeze carries whispers told
so that no one can hear.
The breeze creates a wind chime
as it blows through the leaves of a tree.
The breeze is an artist that alters
the perspective of your imagination.

—Suzanna Acosta, Grade 5
Elliott Elementary
Munster, Indiana

What is It?

(Published as originally submitted)

difrit colors like a raimbow
slow as a tartle
makes pictures like a drawer on a compur
tall as a giraffe
quiet as a hamster
soft as a paint brush
writ like a good draer
draw like a color
pretty as a princess

Answer: Try to find it elsewhere in this section.

—Laurel Carlson, Age 6
Woodbury, Minnesota

Static on the Radio

Static

Sound of static...

"Countries which won most of the gold medals in athletics at Atlanta were America, Russia..."

More static

Sounds of bothering static...

"As the festival in the States is going to begin on Saturday, Crowds of jazz-lovers started to check in today..."

More and more static

Sounds of ear-scratching static...

"Today famous actress Whoopi Goldberg was at the White House. The President, who met her, stated that he was very proud..."

Endless static

Sounds of brain-bubbling static...

"The minister said, 'Now modern America is an equal country; Same rights are given to all members of this community...'"

Continuous static

Again, sounds of unbearable static...

"A rich white citizen who was prosecuted to be guilty Of the murder of two African-American teenagers was found not guilty By the decision of a mixed jury."

I turn off the radio.

The static has too much news in it to listen.

—Zeynep Darendeliler
Istanbul, Turkey

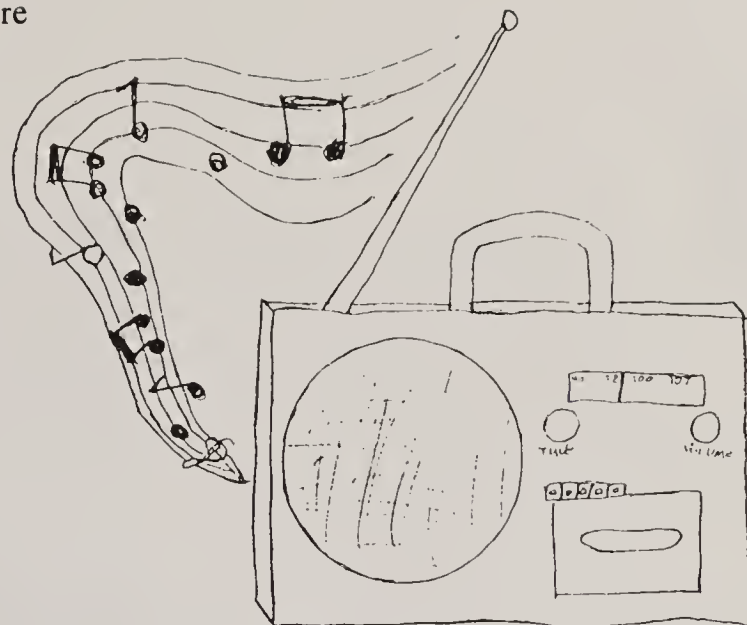
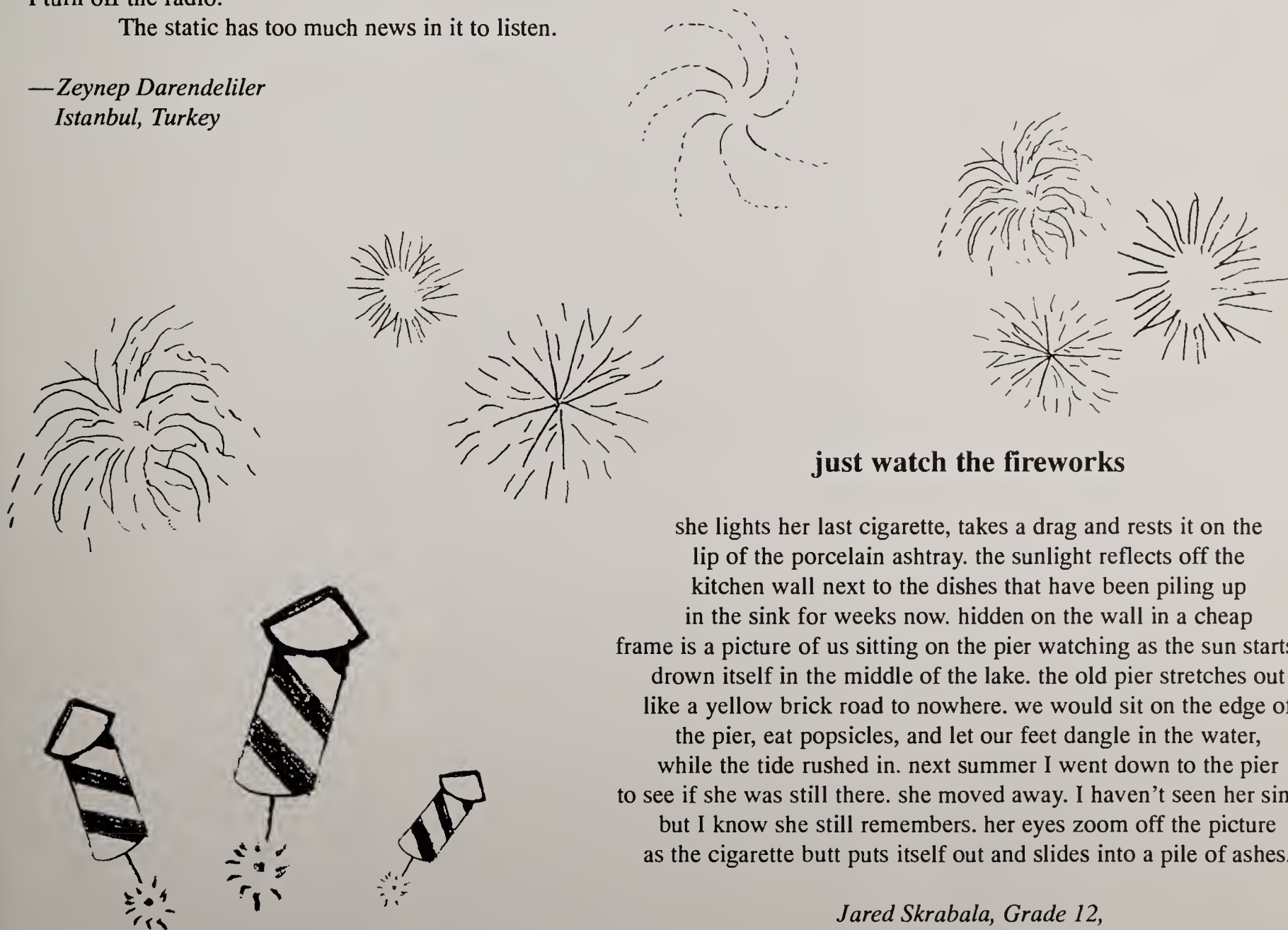


Illustration by Joshua Diehl, Age 14
Merrillville, Indiana



just watch the fireworks

she lights her last cigarette, takes a drag and rests it on the lip of the porcelain ashtray. the sunlight reflects off the kitchen wall next to the dishes that have been piling up in the sink for weeks now. hidden on the wall in a cheap frame is a picture of us sitting on the pier watching as the sun starts to drown itself in the middle of the lake. the old pier stretches out like a yellow brick road to nowhere. we would sit on the edge of the pier, eat popsicles, and let our feet dangle in the water, while the tide rushed in. next summer I went down to the pier to see if she was still there. she moved away. I haven't seen her since, but I know she still remembers. her eyes zoom off the picture as the cigarette butt puts itself out and slides into a pile of ashes.

Jared Skrabala, Grade 12,
attends Wheeling High School
in Wheeling, Illinois.

Illustration by Amanda Diehl, Age 16
Merrillville, Indiana

THE ILLUSION OF SANTA: CHILD'S VIEW

by Julia Cohen

I counted out the cookies. How many would Santa want this year? Last Christmas, I think he ate four. Maybe he was fatter this year. Fat people eat more because their stomachs can hold more food. I better give him five. My mom got the box of Oreos down from the top shelf. (She tries to keep them out of sight from my dad. When I asked her why, she mumbled something about calories. I think calories are similar to mice or gerbils, but I'm not sure.)

All I want for Christmas, besides a baby sister, is a bike (and maybe a Barbie or two). I wonder how Santa will fit the bike into his sleigh. Lately, Santa has become a pretty confusing guy.

"Mom," I patted her shoulder. "How does Santa get into our apartment if there's no chimney? How does he know which houses have people that celebrate Christmas and which houses to avoid? Oh, and how does he get to everyone's house if he has to travel all over the planet in one night?"

Mom cleared her throat, looked up at the ceiling and slowly explained, "Well, Julsie, it's really not that complicated. You see...we leave the window open for Santa and we also have Christmas lights on the balcony so it's like a beacon. He knows where to find us. We also left him a note in Lincoln that gives him directions to Grandma's apartment in Manhattan. Don't worry. And each state has its own time zone so, when he flies from Massachusetts to New York, it's still early. Do you see?"

"Sure," I nodded my head solemnly. Satisfied with her answers, and finished with setting the cookies out, I got into my PJ's. Mom told me the faster I went to bed, the sooner Santa would come. Worn out from the excitement of Christmas Eve, and full from eating half the leftovers, I didn't bother asking for a bedtime story.

With Pinkie the Clown tucked under my arm, I envisioned riding around my neighborhood on my new bike. The other kids would all be playing in the street and I would ride past them and ask if I could pick them

up some candy at the Five and Dime since I could get there quicker than they could. (Big Girls who could ride bikes should still be considerate of Babies who still use tricycles.) As I slowed down to say this, they would try to touch the handlebars of my bike, but the magic powers of my perfect five-speed would repel their grimy hands.



Photograph courtesy of Shirley Jo Moritz

I made it through the dark hallway to the bathroom, barely opening my eyes and without stubbing my toes. I was too short to turn on the light, so I went to the bathroom in the dark and stumbled back to my bed. I wish I knew how to tell time. Maybe the powers of my new bike would help me learn. I gave a quiet shriek of recognition that it was Christmas! Did Santa bring my bike? Did he get lost and have to leave it in Lincoln? What if he brought another tricycle by accident. Santa didn't make mistakes, did he? My mom says that everyone makes mistakes. I grabbed Pinkie and crept into the hall. It takes a while to get to the living room, because if I make too much noise, the

monsters who live on the ninth floor might wake up and eat me.

As soon as I saw a big, angular blob covered in a white sheet, the butterflies in my stomach began to hatch. The butterflies were bouncing off the walls of my tummy. I had to let them out.

"Dad! Mom! Get up! He came!" To their dismay, I leaped onto my parents' bed and pounced on my dad.

As my parents groggily seated themselves on the couch, I didn't need to wait for them to tell me to begin. I whipped the sheet off the blob and stood in awe of The Perfect Bike—magenta wheels, purple handlebars, and a bubble-gum-pink seat. I was in love. This was even better than the picture of the bike I drew for Santa.

The momentary elation of receiving my bike only fueled my need to discover who Santa was. "Mom," I asked. "How did he make this? When did he have the time? Are you sure that you didn't buy this? How did he fit this bike into his red sack? If all the other presents were this heavy, how did the sleigh stay in the air? If monsters and witches don't exist, how do I know that Santa's alive?"

Even with my intense pleasure from receiving my new bike, my mind fought with the dual realities of childhood and knowledge. While I pranced around the violet spokes of my bike, I still struggled with the bits and pieces of adult logic that encroached upon my garden of innocence.

Two days later, my mom interrupted my *Barbies-in-the-Pool* game and sat down next to me. "You wanna be Ken?" I asked, offering him to her.

"No, Honey. I want to tell you something. You are a very smart girl, and your dad and I think you deserve the truth. Santa isn't really a man who lives in the North Pole. Santa is the spirit of Christmas. He is the feeling we all have on Christmas Day of happiness and excitement. But it is Mommy and Daddy who bring the presents."

I looked down at my Barbies and triumphantly began to cry.



THE REALITY OF SANTA: MOTHER'S VIEW

by Julia Cohen

It started a few months before Christmas. Julia began to pepper me with questions about Santa. Every time we passed a store with Christmas decorations, or saw an ad on television about Christmas sales, she always managed to think of intricate questions about Santa. It pained me. I wanted to protect her from breaking through the veil of Christmas magic. Yet her need for logic seemed unyielding. I had expected this at some point, and I thought I was prepared to answer any references to her beloved Santa. I had heard other children ask their parents how Santa made it down the chimney. I could handle that. I even listened as a mother confidently explained how reindeer were able to land on slanted roofs. She clearly described how these reindeer had grooves in their hoofs that created friction and prevented them from slipping off and hurting themselves. I silently applauded her reasoning as I hoped that I, too, could shield Julia from the inevitability of her piercing mind.

I was not, however, prepared to describe how Santa was able to separate the houses that should receive presents from the houses which celebrated Chanukah or observed other traditions. Julsie stopped arranging the cookies for Santa and waited for an answer. I gave Santa magical powers. I saw her accept with a smile the reasoning that Santa had x-ray vision and could see into the houses and tell if they had Christmas trees or menorahs. I relaxed as she filled a glass with green milk (Julia thought Santa might like it dyed for holiday festivity).

While Julia brushed her teeth, I tried to calculate how long it would take to get all the presents wrapped. I had no idea how to wrap her bike. This bike was all Julia talked about for the last few weeks, and it had inspired many of her questions about Santa. I wondered how many letters addressed to Santa the mail service receives every Christmas. I'm sure half of them were Julia's.

She was never entirely satisfied with any of the answers I gave her. Every time I answered one of her questions, she always

responded with, "But then how...?" At a certain point, I felt that I was lying to her, and not just creating part of the Christmas spirit and magic. I wondered how much longer she could wait before Don and I had to tell her the truth. Hopefully, we had a few more Christmases to go.

Santa was more real to Julia than God ever would be. Believing that there are people like Santa, who will grace her with presents because she has been good all year or who will always take care of her needs, can only last so long. Childhood is like living in an egg. Julia is surrounded by a dome of people who adore, cherish and protect her. I want to prevent, for as long as possible, letting this shell crack and having the realities of life seep in and touch her angelic body. Santa fulfilled her wishes and gave her vivid dreams of elves hard at work making presents, Mrs. Claus baking cookies shaped like ice skates or mittens, and reindeer prancing around the North Pole. I didn't want to take that away from her.

At five in the morning, I heard Don groan from the other side of the bed. Focusing my eyes, I saw Julia perched on his chest. Jittery from the excitement of Christmas morning, she grabbed our hands and pulled us into the living room.

"All right," I said. Giving Don a sideways grin, I inquired, "Which one do you want to open first?"

Julsie shrieked, "The sheet. I want to see what's under the sheet!"

"That's funny," I said while raising my eyebrows. "When I came in this room last night at one, I didn't see any of these presents. Santa must have come really late. Well, Honey, go for it."

Julia immediately whipped off the sheet and stood in silence for a few seconds. Slowly, her hand reached out to touch the handlebars. A shiver of pleasure ran through my body as I registered the clear excitement and awe on her face. I put my arm around

Don's waist and smiled.

Julia exclaimed, "Daddy, will you teach me how to ride it right now? We can go outside in the parking lot. Come on."

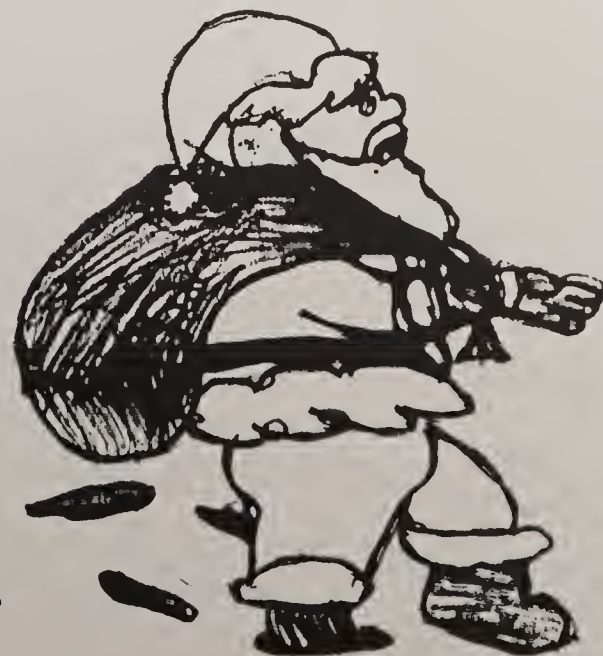
"Julsie, I think we better wait until the sun comes up, okay? How about you open your other presents now. That's not the only one Santa brought you."

While I thought that when Julia received her bike, her quest for the truth would be pacified, it only spurred further inquiries. A month after Christmas, she was still full of questions. Don and I devotedly explained every answer. But there was no end. Julia now ended her questions with, "Are you sure that you didn't give me the bike? Is that the truth? How come it looks just like some of the other bikes in Toys R US?"

When I saw Julia playing with her Barbies one evening, I realized that her imagination was just as much a part of her as her hazel eyes. Julia's creativity would only blossom with time, and I felt that she would not be devastated with the truth. She had her Barbies, tea parties, and bike-riding lessons to focus on.

The funny thing is that, even after she learned about Santa, she still believed in the Tooth Fairy for two more years—and never asked any questions.

*Julia Cohen, Age 17,
lives in Lincoln, Massachusetts.*



*Illustration by Joshua Diehl, Age 14
Merrillville, Indiana*

Froggy
Hop, hop, all around,
From the water to the land,
Eating lots of flies.

—Jenna Tomeo, Grade 5
Elliott Elementary
Munster, Indiana

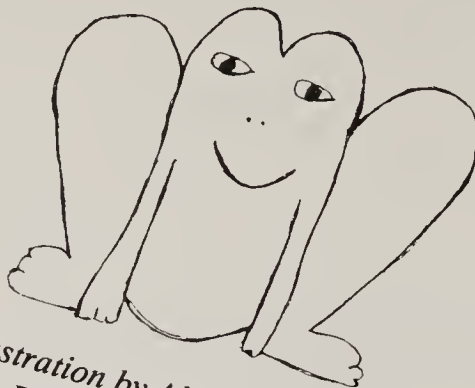


Illustration by Alexis Paz, Age 9
J.W. Riley Elementary, Hammond, Indiana

Ocean

come and look at the ocean
come and look at the way I move my hands
I will laugh at the ocean
I want to stand by the beauty of your presence
I live well in the ocean, you know there's more I like than man
yeah, I love to think of you
now I'll look at the ocean...

—Roger Camara, Age 17
San Antonio, Texas

The Rain

(Series of Haiku)

Always raining here
Never raining over there.
How wet can I get?

It stopped raining here.
Finally, it's raining there.
They must be so wet!

The rain has now stopped.
It's nowhere to be seen.
Now we can all play.

Let's go to the stream
Where the rainwater has drained
Flowing toward freedom!

—Alyssa Tremaine, Grade 5
Elliott Elementary
Munster, Indiana



Illustration by Randalynn Fleener, Age 9
Munster, Indiana

Rain

All the rain that falls from the sky
Is very bad indeed
For every time it falls from up high
I have to go out and weed

—Kelcey Johnson, Age 9
Denver, Colorado

The hot volcano,
Blowing, bursting, shooting high,
Destroys and destroys.

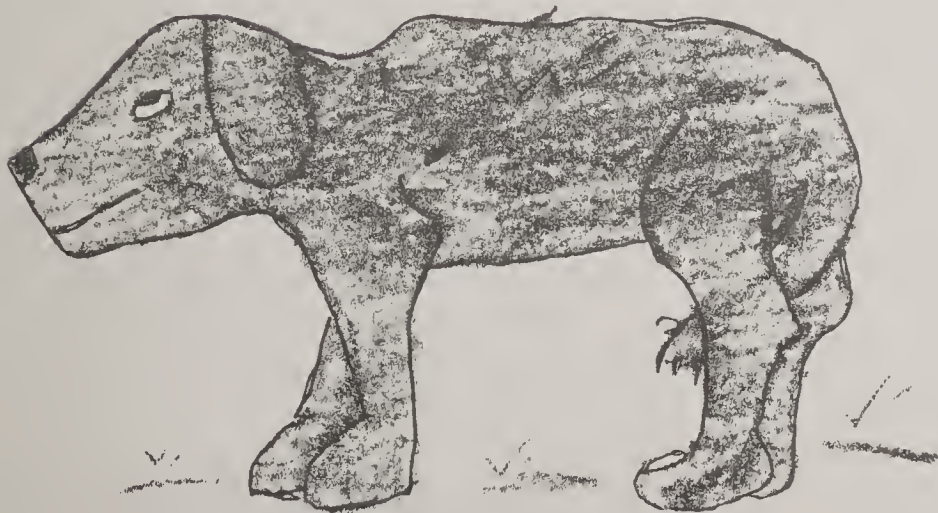
—Chris Topor, Grade 5
Elliott Elementary
Munster, Indiana

I Want to Be

I want to be a scientist
I want to be a giant
I want to be a mom
I want to be little
I want to be a princess
with golden hair

Well, I just want to be me.

—Katelyn Dignin, Age 7
Whiting, Indiana



A Stray

I know a small, brown runaway,
Who's lost and all alone,
And is dreaming every day,
Of a warm and happy home.

You can see it in his pale blue eyes,
That he's really very sad,
His tail hardly ever wags,
I guess he thinks he's bad.

He roams around and eats
Whatever he can find,
And when a cat walks by,
He doesn't even mind.

I watch him every day,
And he glances back at me,
I never have laid eyes on
A better dog than he.

At night I hear him barking,
(Or is it howling?) at the moon,
And I wish upon a lonesome star,
That he'll find his place real soon.

Then I open up the shutters,
And I look up at the sky,
Then I say to that old hound,
"Someday, you will be mine.

—Poem and illustration by
Jessica Salinas, Age 9
West Columbia, Texas

A Building in the Night

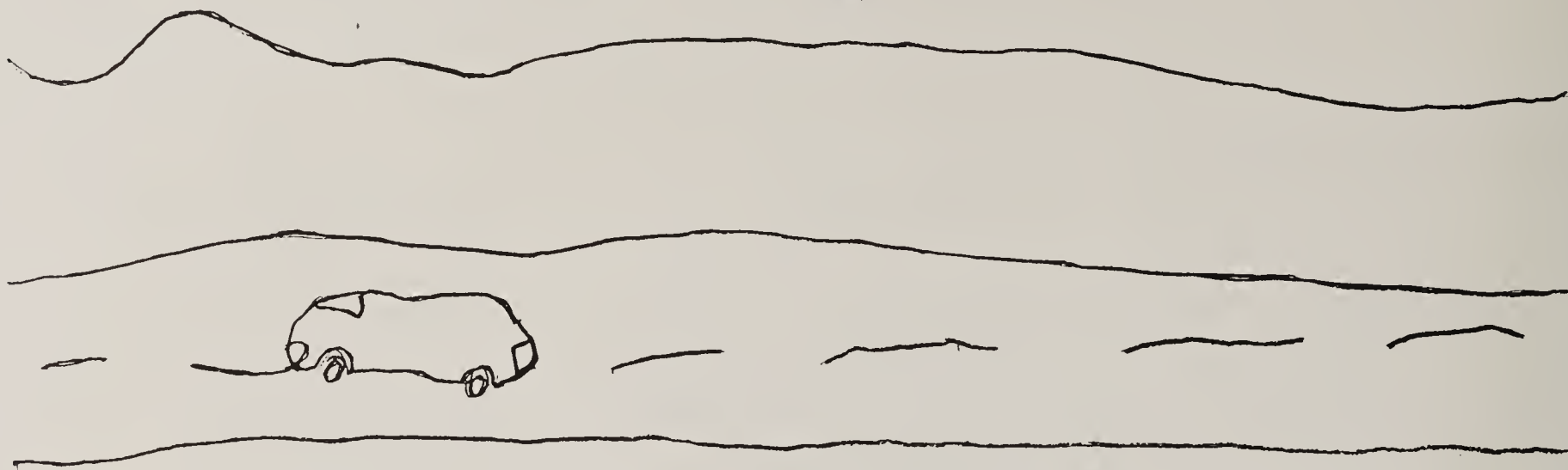
Tall in height,
Black as night,
White windows light up with light
You may think I am a building
But when you push me over
We all go in order
I am a domino, a toy you can see,
But with imagination
I am anything you want me to be.

—Thack Haines, Grade 8
Woodward Academy
College Park, Georgia

Apple Tree

My bark is rough
My leaves are smooth, smooth as a baby's finger
My branches grow gnarled, but still I give you fruit
For I am an apple tree, rough and kind
As I grow older, you grow along beside me
I watch you change from a child to an adult
I see your mistakes, for bad or for good
We are both old now
So sit down beside me
And we will whisper of years long gone.

—Anne Marie Vassalotti, Grade 4
Cross Plains, Wisconsin



HOW WE CAME TO BE

by Jay McKeon



Nature

The bald eagle screams
The longhorn moans
When the sun rises and the light grows

Nature's at work all night and day
While the little energized children play
There are lots of things to do indeed
Instead of being inside watching T.V.

You can be hiking, hunting, fishing, too
I'm sure you'll find something to do
Enjoy where the green grass grows
While your dad watches his corn pop up in rows

You can enjoy camping or bird watching, too
Yoo hoo! You're missing out on something grand
Maybe the birds can make their own band
By grouping on power lines to sing
Or leaving you behind as they take wing

—Scottie Monroe, Grade 4
Stephen F. Austin Elementary
Weatherford, Texas

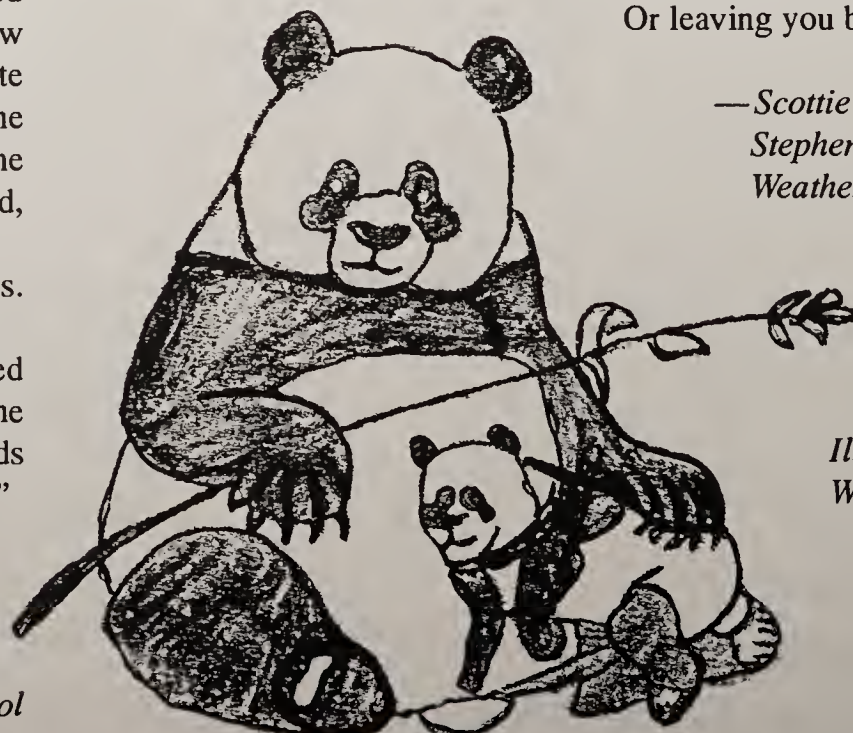


Illustration by Erika Fink, Age 15
Whiting, Indiana

Have you ever thought about
how you came to be? Did you
ever have dreams about it?
Are we the lords of the earth?

Are we the grapes on the vines and the
apples on the trees?

We asked, "Uncle Lake, can you tell us
who we are? Aunt Oak Tree, can you?"

Nobody would tell us. "Wait," we
decided, "we have to ask Coyote."

"Coyote," we asked, "can you tell us
who we are?"

So Coyote looked at us. Coyote looked
down his nose at us. We knew then how
helpless and stupid we were. Coyote
replied, "You are boys and girls of the
new generations to come. You are the
people who make things for the world,
and for coyotes."

For a while, we were speechless.
"Thank you, powerful one," we said.

Since then, our people have lived
together for many seasons, and we are the
servants of Coyote. They call us the lords
of the earth, but they call Coyote "dog."

Jay McKeon, Grade 3,
attends Frances Xavier Warde School
in Chicago, Illinois.



Ruler of the Heavens

On starry nights,
He comes out of his cave
But only to explore and hunt down Cancer,
The ruler of the heavens is he.

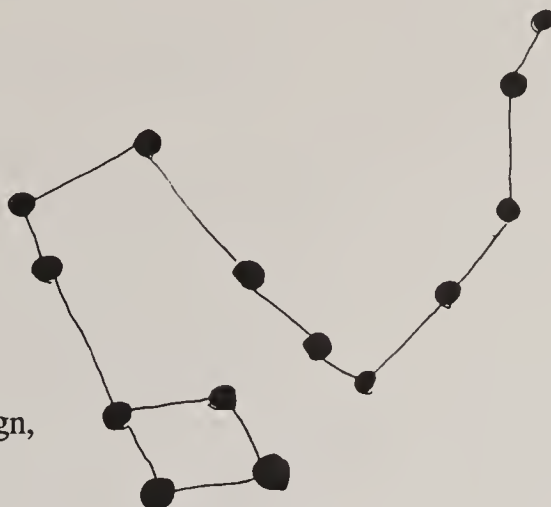
Fighting those who attempt to shorten his reign,
A solitary creature,
A lonely creature,
The ruler of the heavens is he.

A sad creature,
An empty creature,
Fighting to live,
The ruler of the heavens is he.

He has no other dragon friends,
He has no other dragon foes,
Not even a fighting ally,
The ruler of the heavens is he.

The one...
The only...
DRACO!

—Poem and illustration by
Jordan Carrico, Grade 5
Elliott Elementary
Munster, Indiana



Comets

The passing comet's
Beautiful tail fills the
Sky with bright colors.

—Tamiko Toyama, Grade 5
Elliott Elementary
Munster, Indiana

Change

Awaking late every morning from Rainbow Brite sheets
to watch She-ra defeat evil Catwoman.
Barbies, Kens, and Skippers lay about,
tired from the big party the night before.
Mom makes me hot pancakes topped with warm maple syrup.

Endless school days of "show and tell,"
long games of freeze tag at recess, Halloween costume parades,
"Battle of the Books" competitions, and spelling B's.

Adventuring with fraggles and laughing with Mork and Mindy,
getting spooked by ghosts in graveyards, and
sleepovers every weekend.
How those were the days!

Now I awake early and rush to get ready
for another tiring day of high school.
Eyes red and exhausted from the late night of studying before,
body aching from the twelve minute run,
and mind worrying about the huge biology exam sixth hour.

A sip of coffee, a brush of the hair, and a whiff of perfume,
I stumble out into the frigid morning air before sunrise
and begin my long trek to school.

After sunset, I return home, grab a sandwich and a coke, and
return to the gray walls of my room to write but another paper
and to fill out more college applications.

My house grows quiet as family falls asleep, my eyes become heavy,
and my head slowly falls to my cold, solid desk top.
My mind begins to dream of long fun days in the sun
before life so drastically changed—
back when it was simple!
Funny how I never thought so then.

—Candice Langton, Grade 12
Wheeling High School
Wheeling, Illinois

Stars

Stars light the night
alongside the moon.
Stars help you find
your way home.

Stars are our cousins
in the universe.

We gaze up at the stars,
asking ourselves if we'll
ever get to our unknown
hotels!

—Ryan Blanchard, Grade 5
Elliott Elementary
Munster, Indiana



Packrat

Here—a shocking pile of junk.
Rubbish scrounged from every trunk.
Bric-a-brac from long ago.
Nothing I will need, and so,
I'll clear this garbage from my way
And throw it all away today.

But—here's a shirt. I didn't look
Close enough. And here's a book.
You, Too, Can Fix Your Radio.
That sounds like something I should know.
This broken clock, with workings bared,
I'm certain it can be repaired.
These shattered plates, these broken cups,
Surely they can be fixed up.
The more I look, the more I say,
"Why would I throw these things away?"
I can't throw out these seashells, here,
They all are priceless souvenirs.
Here's a lampshade, stained and damp,
I know that I can find a lamp.
And one last thing I'd better take—
A bent, but useful, metal rake.

Now—wait a minute. The pile's no more.
There is a pile on the floor.
But this pile isn't garbage—no,
I really need these items, so
I'll put them all back in their trunk,
And *then*, I'll clean my house of junk.

—Poem and illustrations by
Christopher Silverman, Age 18
Simsbury, Connecticut

Answer to poem "What is It?"
on page 80 of this section:

An Artist

The Red Door

The house stood two stories tall
With blue siding and white trim
A weathered deck in the back
And a fireplace on the side
Names etched in the concrete
Marks on the wall
The constant barking of our old dog
There were trees that grew up with me
Cupboards too tall to reach
Easter egg hunts
And Christmas lights
I will always remember the smell of the flowers
The swing set I spent hours on
The neighbors that would play with me
And that red door

—Nicholas Vondrak, Grade 12
Wheeling High School
Wheeling, Illinois



In the Hall

I see him
standing at
the end of
the crowded hall.
A quick glance at
his handsome face,
then back at my friends
who don't pause
for air
from their hearty talk.
He's with the
loud group
by my locker.
I hope and pray
he'll see me
and
maybe talk to
me today.
I say,
"see ya later,"
to my friends
who casually
wave goodbye.
I squeeze my way
safely past the
herd of high school
junior boys,
turn the dial of the lock,
look up
and
see him smiling
at me.

—Jennifer Dunbar, Grade 12
Wheeling High School
Wheeling, Illinois



Endless Beach

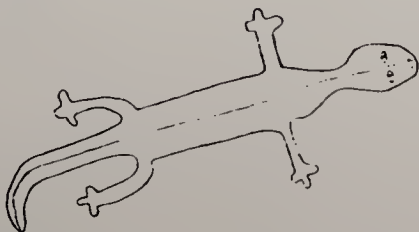
Wrinkled, aged hearts
salty and dry from the sea
Or maybe tears or...
maybe both.
The wind has smoothed over
the lines of pain so deep.
The sand has invaded
the privacy of ears, eyes,
mouth, fingernails.
The water soothes the skin,
numbs the muscles,
frees the mind
to explore the shores
of the soul,
and drown in its depth
once more.

—*Jessica George, Age 16*
Baldwin, Maryland

Blessings

A hole in the wall where the doorknob struck
in a room with three beds; two stacked, unmade
pictures tacked to the wall
near a window with a blanket curtain.
A couch and two chairs are filled
in a larger room with the T.V.
together some sit on the floor
little runny noses and stinky diapers.
In the kitchen, she turns a spoon
through the thick, creamy corn
the smell of hot, cornmeal-coated fish
mixes with butter melting on brown-crust cornbread.
They run from the rooms to sit on high stools
and to fight for the cushioned chairs
then the Children with white teeth and bright faces
recite a blessing before the evening meal.

—*Keturah Drake, Age 17*
Port Gibson, Mississippi



"Lizard" illustration by *Andrea Gonzalez, Age 9*
J.W. Riley Elementary, Hammond, Indiana

As I Am Me

As I skated the ice
My skates became
Doves with room to fly

As I learned my skills
My talents became
Wisdom unafraid to die

As I learned to love
And became your friend
Within my heart
You had room to play

As you left my
Life and my world
My tears
Tucked my smile away

—*Chantay Rogers, Age 17*
Wheeling High School
Wheeling, Illinois

What I Like Best

I dream to the sky
Further than the moon is high.
I love my dreams of singing,
I really love them!
I'll sing my songs and ring my bells
Just in time for Christmas!
Merry Christmas!

—*Brittney Walker, Age 9*
Chicago, Illinois

Evil Encounter

The icy wind blows
Through the miniature cracks in the window.
Creeping toward me like a fox
Through the warm comfortable air
Until it overtakes my exposed face and feet.

I pull them close to my warm body
Hidden safely under a massive new wool blanket.
The stinging air tries with all its might
To break through the blockade I've put up
But soon dies for it is weak against the
Thick mound of fleece
That protects me from this evil encounter.

—*Jennifer Dunbar, Grade 12*
Wheeling High School
Wheeling, Illinois

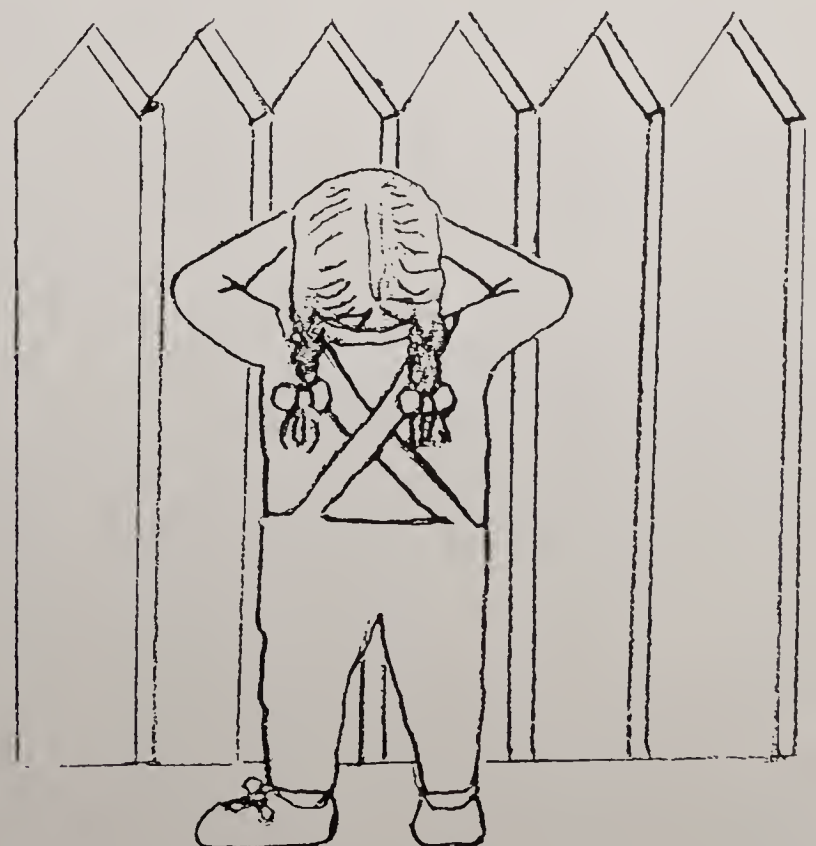


Illustration by *Erika Fink, Age 15*
Whitine, Indiana



The Same New Beginning

The sun emerges from the mountains
Shining its rays afar
Leaves unfold
Flowers blossom

Another long day for the ants
Building and rebuilding
The hill that is their home

Birds singing, chirping,
While feasting on fresh worms
A squirrel climbs down
From his penthouse in the trees
Gathering up his gourmet nuts and berries

I sit at my table
Reading the newspaper
While sipping morning's coffee

—Samnang Ven, Grade 12
Wheeling High School
Wheeling, Illinois

Masterpiece

You painted a picture of me in your head
What you wanted me to be,
What you needed me to be,
All pocketed into an easily-shattered image.

You used watercolors, but they began to drip off the canvas,
To run and smear with truth's course that was slowly beginning to form.
You dabbled only in the bright colors,
Which were barely reminiscent of the real me.

I wanted to guide your hand away from the palette,
To let you know I couldn't live up to the beauty you wanted me to portray.
Now, after the picture has faded some,
You glance back to the easel,
Which once acted as a crutch that braced you from reality.

Every time I falter, you look in that direction with disappointment,
Unaware that you painted the shoes
I cannot fill.

—Allison Rogers, Age 17
Michigan City, Indiana

An Empty Canvas

My eyes close fast and heavy.
Mack trucks,
barreling down the road to dreamland.
Thoughts of the day put me at peace.
Hoping to dream.
Staring into an empty canvas.
The most abstract thoughts,
brushed on effortlessly.
Ideas no one ever created.
Forming,
with such brilliant colors.
My mind painting so freely.
Scenes changing with the turn of my head.
To be in such a world,
I could only wish existed.
Waking up with no idea of why.
I stare off into darkness.
Hoping to find dreamland
once again,
and create another masterpiece.

—Todd LePere, Grade 12
Wheeling High School
Wheeling, Illinois

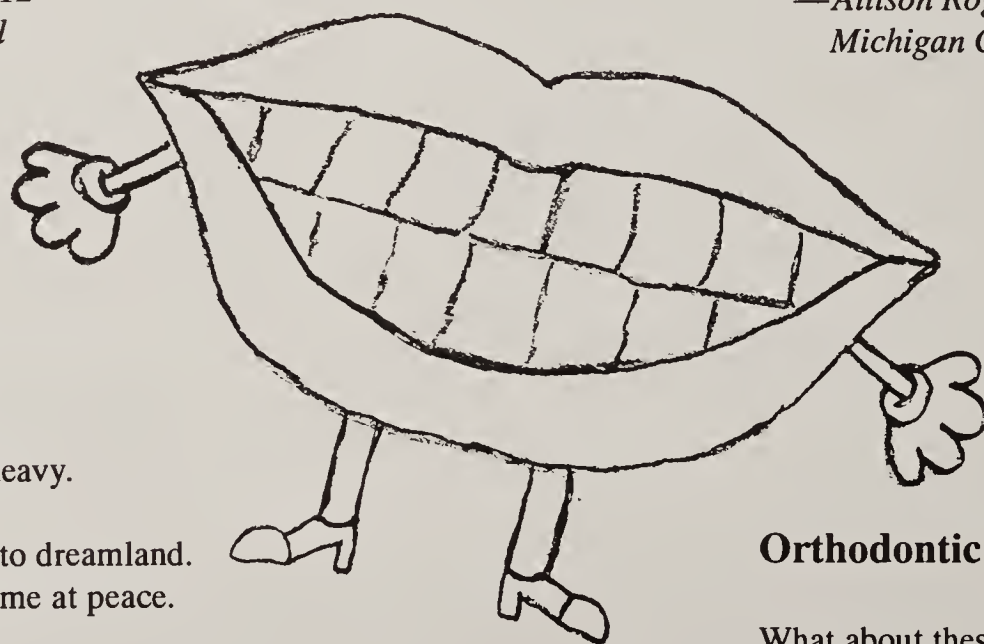


Illustration by Erika Fink, Age 15
Whiting, Indiana

Orthodontic Man

What about these teeth that grow astray,
twisting and turning in every which way?
The role of the pearl-drop movie star smile,
has not been played in a long, long while.
Who rescues me from life, hiding behind
a locker and fan—
There is no other than the orthodontic man!

Trapped behind brackets and metal bars,
I'm restricted from eating candies
like Snickers and Mars!
After eighteen months of pain and gain,
my teeth are now perfectly straight.
But now I'm on parole with a retainer
as a lifelong inmate.
And that great smile, and all the fame that can,
comes from no other than the orthodontic man!

—Brenna Brucker, Age 11
Bethel Park, Pennsylvania



A DAY IN MY LIFE

by Emily Howell

Have you ever wanted to be a cat? Glossy fur, gleaming eyes that can see in the dark, graceful beyond belief? Able to jump twice your height into the air? Tail waving, head high with a regal air? You're smart. Cats rule.

My name is Rum Tum Tigger. I have striped fur, and it's so long that people love to dig their fingers into it. I am a great favorite. Life for me is a lot better than being one of you clumsy humans. Cats can jump higher, hear better, smell better, and see in the dark.

I also have a nice life. Say it's afternoon. Hey! Emily's coming home from school. I yawn, stretch, and stroll lazily over to her as she walks home from school. I sit on the sidewalk, blocking her path, sure that she'll pick me up. I carefully avoid eye contact, as if I didn't *want* her to pick me up. After all, cats have to maintain a certain air of dignity, and we wouldn't want to look too eager.

Of course, she can't resist my beautiful fur and picks me up. I wait for a while, then purr. If I purred too soon, it wouldn't be dignified. She carries me inside, then puts me down. I rub against her legs and she picks me up again. Then, back outside I go. Well, I sit on the rug in front of the door until someone opens it.

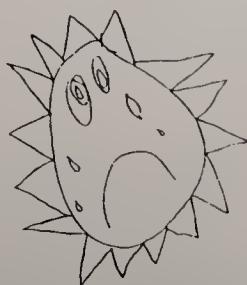


Illustration by Steven Crague, Age 7
Merrillville, Indiana

When I'm outside, I go over to one of my favorite spots—in front of the food dish! Not that I'm a fat cat or anything—far from it! I get plenty of exercise. After I eat, I sun myself on the porch until Mark gets home. We go through the same procedure that happened with Emily. But when he puts me down, I don't go outside. I check to see what they're having for dinner. If Emily's milk from breakfast is still on the table, soon I'm on the table and the milk has disappeared. If they're having meat for dinner, I whine around their mother's legs. She'll give me some scraps every time. After I've secured several pieces of chicken or beef or whatever they happen to be having, I'll go outside.

It's time to explore! First, how about chasing that nutty squirrel over there who's chattering at me. I go across the street, but—hey, there's a car! I scamper quickly under someone's truck. Whew! The coast's clear. Oh! What time is it? 5:10? Great! That lady and her dog always come for a walk about that time. He'll come and bark at me. I arch my back and hiss, yet the dog still barks at me. Hey! Who cares? His owner's holding his leash tightly. I turn my back and walk coldly away, my plumed tail waving disdainfully in the air. Some other such adventures usually follow, such as close calls with bicycles, cars, and growling dogs. I might catch a mole or a squirrel if I'm lucky. Those silly humans actually don't appreciate it when I leave a tasty morsel as a gift on the porch. Really! Well, how disappointing.

Usually around this time all the food from the dish is gone. But Emily or her mother usually replenish the supply. Two cats, besides me, run over to eat—my brother Snowball and my mother Snowflake. Snowball and I back off quickly most of the time; our mother is not about to share the full dish with us. She *is* our mother, and she's going through that the-children-should-go-and-get-married-so-I-don't-have-to-share-with-them-and-they-are-such-a-nuisance-back-off-children stage. Well, actually, she'll be in that stage for the rest of her life, since we *are* old enough to go away.

Nighttime! Emily takes me upstairs and lies down in bed. She pets me so I purr, but I keep rubbing against her face and she has to pet me more. She wants me to lie still, I know, but that's ridiculous! I wander around the room until she calls me back to her. Then I usually settle myself around her feet and keep purring until her mother comes to take me outside.

Outside, I prowls around and watch the moon. I think the moon is so beautiful and wonderful, and the stars, too. I really am a poetic sort, you know. I wrote a poem about the stars:

*The stars are beautiful,
Shining so brightly,
The stars are nocturnal,
Because they gleam nightly,
If I was a star,
Glued to the sky,
I'd twinkle bright and
You'd wonder why
That star up there
Had so much more spark
Than stars that were closer,
At an advantage to the dark.
You'd look into the sky,
And the star you would first see
Would very definitely, so for sure
Really and truly, be me!*

Actually, my brother Snowball wrote that, but I *have* written some things. Anyway, I hang around all night, and when morning comes, I go into the house. Soon Emily leaves for school, but she always pets me and promises me she'll come home. She always does. Cats may see better, hear better, smell better, look better, and be more graceful than humans, but humans are really okay on keeping promises.

*Emily Howell, Age 10,
attends R. S. Payne School
in Lynchburg, Virginia.*



CATTAIL

October, windy blue
is in,
the sky leaf-gold,
the cricket slow,
the moon
a lost
and ranging rose . . .

"Dipping the Cattail
in fat and lighting it,
settlers used it as a
water torch."

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THE WILDFLOWERS
OF PURDUE CALUMET

and

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INDEX TO GRAPHICS

	Page		Page		Page
Bunker, Marie	6, 48, 66	Fleming, Dale	13, 26, 44, 46, 47, 72-73	Rubinger, Julie	54-55
Bush, Jessica	79	Fleener, R.	84	Salatiello, Erika	24-25
Carlson, Jean	52, 53, 60-61	Gonzalez, A.	89	Salinas, Jessica	85
Carrico, Jordan	87	Hunter, Brian	2-3, 10-11	Scott, Sarah	33
Cartwright, Steve	23, 36, 37, 38, 50	Hunter, Erik	62	Sherman, Bryan	78
Crague, Alan	76, 77	Hunter, Millie	59	Silverman, Chris	80, 88
Crague, Steven	91	Liu, Chang	58	Stone, Della	68
Darnell, Ryan	86	Malish, David	35, 40	Stowe, Sarah	31, 65
Diehl, Amanda	81	McGlaun, Cheyenne	32	Stroup, Isaiah	74
Diehl, Joshua	81, 83	Moritz, S.	82	Wilson, Stacy	39, 42, 43, 63, 64
Fink, Erika	86, 89, 90	Paz, Alexis	84		

INDEX TO CHILDHOOD

Blackburn, Tim	Inside cover, 50	Kubicek, J.L.	56	Sanders, Bonny	49
Brown, Joyce	73	Loiacono, Therese	70	Schwantie, Kristin	57
Catalano, Mike	73	Mauch, Chris	58	Taksa, Mark	66
Clarkson, Joanne	58	McClellan, Jane	61	Tinkham, Charles	66
Deweese, Virginia	67	McMillan, Linda	50	Upham, Sondra	61
Dotson, Christina	63	Michniewicz, Cathy	62	Walker, Brittney	65
Fowler, Sandra	60	Moritz, Shirley Jo	60, 61	Wellingham-Jones, Pat	60
Goldsmith, Sandra	72	Morrill, Billie	62	Wilson, Patricia	71
Gray, Odie Martez	48	Nalbor, Daniel	59	Zimmerman, Joanne	51
Hasan, Rabiul	72	Paul, E. D.	66		

INDEX TO POETRY & PROSE

Allen, Candice	43	Fowler, Sandra	15	Pobo, Kenneth	25
Ames, Morgan	34	Ganguli, Nancy	32	Portolano, Charles	28
Baldoni, Nicholas	33	Goldsmith, Sandra	18	Quintero, Maya	31
Balog, B.E.	34, 44	Greig, A. Josef	35	Ruben, Laura	16
batista, liony	25, 39	Grey, John	43	Sanford, Verne	41
Beard, David	29	Gutierrez, Jesus	17	Sawyer, Larry	36
Beyer, William	44	Hamilton, Carol	23	Selden, Anne	26
Birch, Judith	44	Hardy, K.S.	7	Sheehan, John	17
Brown, Jennifer	36	Hatfield, Elaine	19	Stamper, Jr., Gordon	18
Brown, Joyce	42	Holder, Doug	24	Stokes, Robert	25
Carlson, Nancy	6	Johnson, Jan	45	Stone, Lois	24
Clarkson, Joanne	42	Kelley, Ward	36	Thomas, Susan	35
Coleman, Earl M.	27	Kennedy, Joanne	26	Thorburn, Matthew	8
Cooke, Robert P.	16	Kopel, Stephen	22	Tinkham, Charles	15, 18
Corrigan, Michael	31	Lee, L.L.	12	Valis, Noel	40
Cummings, John M.	37	Macekura, J.	34	Vance, Richard	43
Dean, Stephanie	35	Marshall, Jon	40	Webster, Diane	26
DeMay, Anna	39	McCullom, Dave	16	White, Henry	17
Dunkelberg, Kendall	15	Mitchell, Rich	34	whitehead, john	23
Eaton, Charles	7	Moncrieff, Scott	42	Wiloch, Thomas	24
Ellis, Konnie	9	Moritz, Shirley Jo	39, 44	Witte, Francine	39
Farmer, Rod	35	Niditch, B.Z.	23	Young, Michael	30
Florence, Emily	42	Petruske, Rosalie	26	Zipper, Gerald	39

INDEX TO YOUNG WRITERS

Acosta, Suzanna	80	Drake, Keturah	89	Rogers, Allison	90
Anderson, Krystyn	75	Dunbar, Jennifer	88, 89	Rogers, Chantay	78, 89
Blanchard, Ryan	87	George, Jessica	89	Salinas, Jessica	85
Brucker, Brenna	90	Haines, Thack	85	Silverman, Christopher	88
Burton, Heather	77	Howell, Emily	91	Skrabala, Jared	81
Camara, Roger	84	Johnson, Kelcey	84	Tomeo, Jenna	84
Carlson, Laurel	80	Kaffel, Meredith	76, 79	Topor, Chris	85
Carrico, Jordan	87	Klamm, Daniel	76	Toyama, Tamiko	87
Clayton, Robert	75	Langton, Candice	87	Tremaine, Alyssa	84
Cohen, Julia	82, 83	LePere, Todd	90	Vassalotti, A.	85
Connolly, Pat	76	McKeon, Jay	86	Ven, Samnang	90
Culver, Tanya	75	Monroe, Scottie	86	Vondrak, Nicholas	88
Darendeliler, Zeynep	81	O'Neil, Tim	75	Walker, Brittney	89
Dignin, Katelyn	85	Pitts, Sarah	75		

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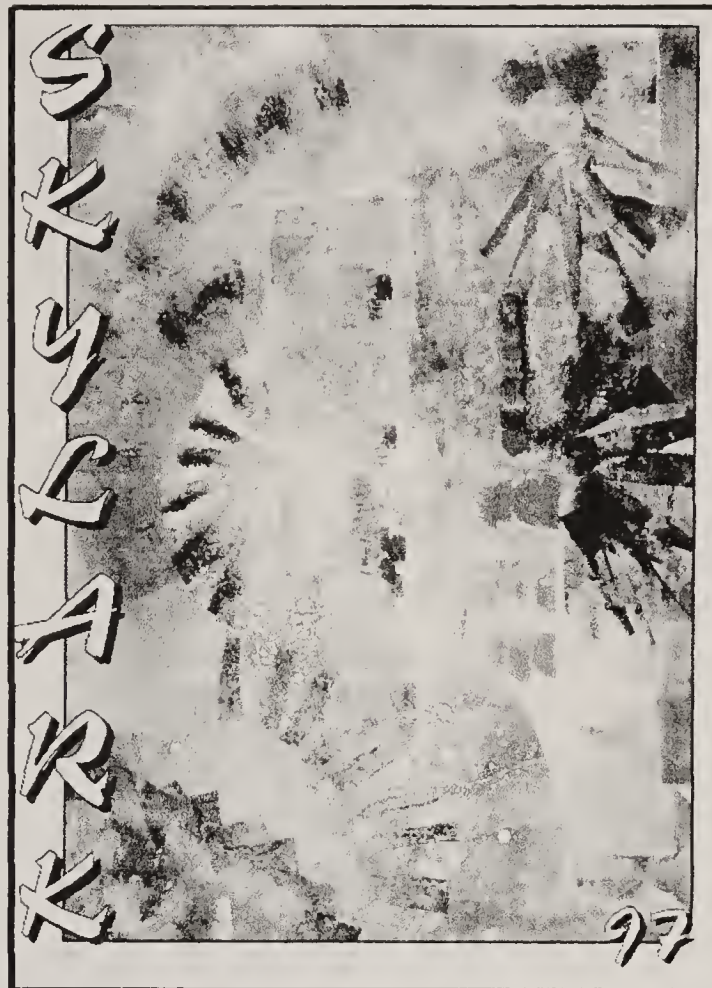
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